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'For the Good of the Breed'  
Care, Ethics, and Responsibility in Pedigree Dog  
Breeding

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PhD in Social Anthropology  
University of Edinburgh  
2017



## Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where states otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

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Date:



## Abstract

This thesis examines how the ethics of caring for pedigree dogs differ in the contexts of dog showing and veterinary practice. By highlighting conflicts around the shared use of 'ordinary language', I show how tensions between show-world and veterinary perspectives relate to divergent understandings of 'health'. Canine bodies speak to vets and breeders in conceptually different ways, so much so that breed-specific features can be considered 'perfect' in the show-ring yet 'pathological' in the veterinary clinic. Developing the emergent anthropological perspective that care is both a moral and an embodied practice, I argue that the qualities of moral virtue and aesthetic virtue are inextricably linked in the care practices by which breeders aim to produce and sustain canine bodies in their idealised forms. Also fundamental to show-world notions of care is the understanding that care for dog and care for breed are one and the same. In sharp contrast, veterinary practice attends to dogs as individuals rather than members of breeds. Here, I examine how breeders and vets respond to the multiple and conflicting demands of caring for pedigree dogs in the course of encounters often fraught with unresolved tension. Asking how seemingly irreconcilable notions of what counts as good health play out in these negotiations, I argue that care can depend on the ability to transcend – or at least overlook – different ethical orientations. In practice, I argue that negotiations between breeders and vets are often non-verbal and based on a mutual understanding that the ability to work together in performing care relies not only on clear communication but, at times, on a knowing silence. Under ever-increasing pressure to engage with veterinary notions of health, many show-breeders now deem ignorance of veterinary knowledge – and silence in the face of disease – ethically virtuous. I therefore conclude that deliberate silence and selective ignorance enable breeders and vets to temporarily reconcile their different understandings of what is good, thus allowing both parties to meet their respective responsibilities of care.

## Lay Summary

This thesis examines how the ethics of caring for pedigree dogs differ in the contexts of dog-showing and veterinary practice. It focuses on how differently breeders and vets understand their responsibilities of care. In 2012, following a series of public scandals over pedigree-dog health, veterinary surgeons were for the first time invited into the show-ring to give their professional opinions on the wellbeing of some of the world's most successful show-dogs. My research follows events before, during, and after these veterinary health checks were introduced, examining what counts as health and disease in the show ring and in the veterinary clinic. Central to my thesis is the claim that, although breeders and vets both use the terms 'health', 'fitness', and 'dog', these terms often mean very different things in the context of their respective practices. Yet my argument goes beyond the claim that breeders and vets are simply at odds over divergent use of shared language. In both cases, practice-specific concepts of health and fitness come with particular understandings of what counts as disease, why disease occurs in pedigree dogs and – crucially – who is at fault. Yet while veterinary concepts of responsibility and care clash with breeders' views, vets and breeders are nonetheless mutually reliant and must find ways to work together in daily practice. Hence, I argue that in both the clinic and the show-ring, silence and the willingness to make ethical compromises are key to providing 'good' care for pedigree dogs.

Key Terms: Ethics, Care, Responsibility, Pedigree Dogs, Dog Showing, Breeding, Nature, Veterinary Medicine, Human-Animal Relations, Health.

## Table of Contents

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Introduction.....   | 10  |
| A History of Tensions.....                                    | 20  |
| The Show-World .....  | 27  |
| Pedigree Dogs: Responsibility, ethics, and care .....         | 33  |
| The Ethics of Care across Species Lines.....                  | 43  |
| Methodology .....   | 45  |
| Field Site .....  | 51  |
| Ethics .....  | 52  |
| Terminology .....   | 54  |
| Chapter Summaries .....                                       | 56  |
| Chapter One - Setting the Standard: What is a Good Dog? ..... | 62  |
| The Importance of the Pedigree.....                           | 67  |
| Standard-Fitting Show Dogs .....                              | 74  |
| Breed Histories.....  | 81  |
| The Image of a Breed.....                                     | 91  |
| Fit for Function .....  | 92  |
| Dogs, or members of breeds? .....                             | 94  |
| The ‘Problem’ of Unregistered Dogs.....                       | 97  |
| Conclusion.....   | 100 |
| Chapter Two – Good Breeders: Maintaining the Standard.....    | 104 |



|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Good Breeders – The Virtue of Sacrifice .....                  | 113 |
| The Virtue of Skilled Practice .....                           | 116 |
| Judging – Maintaining the Standard.....                        | 120 |
| Cultivating a Judge’s Vision .....                             | 122 |
| Cultivating Distance .....                                     | 126 |
| Relations in the Show-Ring.....                                | 129 |
| Relations in the Kennel.....                                   | 132 |
| Conclusion.....  | 135 |
| Appendix.....  | 139 |
| Chapter Three – The Art of Breeding .....                      | 142 |
| Rules and Regulations.....                                     | 148 |
| The Art of Skilled Breeding.....                               | 152 |
| The Limits of Inbreeding .....                                 | 161 |
| Culling as a Practice of Care.....                             | 165 |
| Conclusion.....  | 170 |
| Chapter Four - Making Breeds: The Production of an Image ..... | 174 |
| The Image of the Breed .....                                   | 177 |
| Breeds and their Histories .....                               | 179 |
| In the show-ring .....   | 180 |
| The Production of an Image .....                               | 184 |
| Illicit Modification.....                                      | 191 |
| Modifying Faults .....   | 194 |
| Conclusion.....  | 204 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Chapter Five – Pathology or Perfection? Care and responsibility in the show-ring and the clinic..... | 208 |
| The High Profile Breeds - a brief history .....  | 215 |
| The Canine Alliance .....  | 218 |
| Normal vs Pathological in the Pedigree Dog World.....  | 220 |
| Press Hostility .....  | 225 |
| The View from (a) Veterinary Practice .....  | 227 |
| Conflicts Continue.....  | 237 |
| Conclusion.....  | 241 |
| Chapter Six – Testing Disease: Public Secrecy and the Virtue of Ignorance .....                      | 244 |
| Health Testing .....   | 249 |
| Health Testing: A Double-Edged Sword.....  | 251 |
| Standardising Health.....  | 252 |
| The Consequences of Negative Test Results.....   | 258 |
| The Virtue of Ignorance .....  | 263 |
| Talking or Not Talking about Disease.....  | 265 |
| DNA Tests.....   | 267 |
| Conclusion.....  | 273 |
| Chapter Seven – Negotiating Care .....   | 278 |
| Surgical Interventions and the Ethics of Care .....  | 285 |
| Maintaining Life.....  | 292 |
| The Cost of Maintaining Life .....   | 301 |

|                                 |     |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| Conclusion.....                 | 307 |
| Chapter Eight – Conclusion..... | 310 |
| Acknowledgements.....           | 326 |
| References.....                 | 328 |

## Introduction

‘People who do not move in the ‘Doggy World’, or have no intimate friends who do, have not the *least notion* of what a large and important world it is,’

Charles Lane (1902)  
*Dog Shows and Doggy People*  
(Italics as original)

On August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008, the public service broadcaster of the United Kingdom - the British Broadcasting Corporation, or BBC – transmits an hour-long television documentary entitled *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*. The programme shows footage of pedigree dogs from a number of breeds displaying signs of serious pain and discomfort. The show opens with the chief veterinary officer of the UK’s leading animal welfare charity, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) reporting that his organization is ‘extremely concerned about the very high levels of disability, deformity, and disease in Pedigree dogs.’<sup>1</sup> The other senior veterinary specialists, geneticists, and historians featured in the programme all agree that these problems are the result of selective breeding, commonly practiced by breeders who produce pedigree dogs for exhibition in the show-ring.

The first breed introduced in *Pedigree Dogs Exposed* is the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel. This is the sixth most popular breed in the UK and, according to the documentary makers, one of the sickest. Viewers are shown video clips of Cavaliers writhing, twitching, and yelping in pain, apparently due to the effects of a hereditary condition known as syringomyelia. As a veterinary neurologist explains, the pain results from the skull of the Cavalier being too small to comfortably hold the brain. The narrator points out that small-headed Cavaliers are desirable in the show-world - so desirable that, in their attempts to breed the ‘perfect’ specimen, generations of show-breeders have bred dogs with smaller and smaller heads. The size of the Cavalier’s brain, however, has remained

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<sup>1</sup> Evans, M. (2008) in *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*. Passionate Productions.

relatively large, so, as veterinary neurologist Clare Rusbridge puts it, 'The brain is like a size 10 foot which had been shoved into a size 6 shoe. It doesn't fit.'<sup>2</sup> Rusbridge goes on to explain that syringomyelia is understood to be one of the most painful conditions a human can suffer. It causes burning pain and 'piston-type headaches,' to the point where 'even light touch, even items of clothing – a collar for example, can induce discomfort.'<sup>3</sup> What is more, Rusbridge claims, while as many as 70% of Cavaliers are thought to be affected by the condition, few breeders are willing to talk about the problem, and few owners who keep the dogs as pets - or even their vets - are aware of the disease and its symptoms. Hence, affected dogs that hide behind couches and avoid sunlight are commonly assumed to be suffering from behavioural issues, rather than syringomyelia. But even when diagnosed correctly, dogs seriously affected by the disease are given dire treatment options; they face either euthanasia or 'risky surgery' during which the back of the skull is removed '... to make more room for the dog's brain.'<sup>4</sup> And yet, the Cavaliers' problems are more grievous still. Also featured in the programme is an interview with a leading cardiologist who claims that the breed is beset with early onset heart disease, so much so that 50% of Cavaliers have a detectable heart murmur by age five, a figure which rises to almost 100% by the time the dogs reach ten or eleven years of age.<sup>5</sup>

Controversially, the documentary claims that the Cavalier is far from alone in suffering high rates of conformational and genetic health defects. A pedigree Pug named George is evaluated by a veterinary surgeon, who finds that the dog has:

'Problems in both [back] legs with his knee-caps sitting out of joint on both sides... his stomach has got a problem where ... [it] is protruding into his chest cavity ... [in] his throat ... we've got a partial collapse of the larynx, elongated soft palate ... his nose is squashed up; he's got narrowing of the nasal cavities, which is causing problems breathing...

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<sup>2</sup> Rusbridge, C. (2008) in *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*. Passionate Productions.

<sup>3</sup> Rusbridge, C. (ibid)

<sup>4</sup> Harrison, J. (2008) in *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*. Passionate Productions.

<sup>5</sup> Swift, S. (2008) in *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*. Passionate Productions.

in his eyes, he's got an in-rolling of the lower eyelids which are rubbing on the eyes. Finally, he's got a curvature of the spine.'<sup>6</sup>



*Figure 1: George the Pug, featured on the 2008 BBC documentary, Pedigree Dogs Exposed.<sup>7</sup>*

Like other Pugs, George has a breed-typical 'squashed' face, wrinkled skin, and corkscrew tail, features which, according to representatives of the veterinary profession, cause breathing difficulties, eye damage, and spinal problems like those suffered by George. Yet according to George's owners, pedigree dog breeders and judges in the show-world take a different view of the dog. In breeders' eyes, his body fits well within the Pug Breed Standard - the written description of the image of an ideal breed specimen to which breeders and dog show judges refer when producing and assessing pedigree dogs. As George's owners claim:

'We're always told that George is a very good Pug ... He's got all the right [blood] lines and everything. Even with his spinal problems, to look at him as a show dog, he's a beautiful dog.'<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Worth, D. (2008) in *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*. Passionate Productions.

<sup>7</sup> Screenshot from *Pedigree dogs Exposed*. (2008) Passionate Production.

<sup>8</sup> Morris, J. (2008) in *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*. Passionate Productions.



*Figure 2: A vet points to an x-ray showing the curvature of George the Pug's spine.<sup>9</sup>*

George is so well thought of by show-breeders and judges that, when entered in dog shows, he has been awarded high enough honours to qualify him for Crufts – arguably the world's most famous and prestigious dog show, held annually and organised by the British Kennel Club. What is more, as the programme's narrator and producer, Jemima Harrison, points out:

'There's nothing to stop Joanne breeding from George. The Kennel Club would happily register George's puppies because no Pug has to pass any health tests before it can be bred from.'<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, by the time the programme airs, the Kennel Club – the governing body which regulates pedigree dog breeding and showing in the UK – has made only one health test compulsory; a genetic test for a disease called canine leucocyte adhesion deficiency in the Irish Setter and the Red and White Irish Setter. When questioned for the purposes of the programme, the Kennel Club's own geneticist reports that the organization is against the introduction of widespread, compulsory health-testing, on the basis that:

'We have this feeling in the UK that if we tried to [introduce compulsory health testing], we'd actually drive breeders away, and

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<sup>9</sup> Screenshot from *Pedigree Dogs Exposed* (2008) Passionate Productions

<sup>10</sup> Harrison, J. (2008) *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*. Passionate Productions.

then we've lost contact with them. I think that's part of the British psyche: 'You're not going to tell me what to do with my life.'<sup>11</sup>

Whether or not this claim holds any substance, the documentary is not kind to breeders of pedigree show dogs, who are summarily portrayed as stuffy, naive, archaic, and wilfully ignorant of health problems affecting their breeds. Implicit in the commentary is a questioning of the relationship between show-breeders and their dogs, which, as the producers rightfully recognise, is significantly different from the relationship between pet-owners and dogs. Breeders, it seems, have an alternative set of priorities which, the programme suggests, means that they emphasise the need to produce dogs that will win prizes in the show-ring over the need to ensure the health and wellbeing of individual dogs. Yet one of the main issues seems to be that breeders simply do not recognise the high levels of suffering in their breeds.

When George the Pug's breeder is interviewed at a dog show surrounded by short-faced Pugs snorting and gasping for breath, she reports that:

'With the [Pug's] nose being so short, you're actually pushing the skin back into the throat. If they get excited, the soft palate can block their airway, but the dog will just, you know, sort of like probably pass out and then it will just come through again. It may look exaggerated, but really, the Pug hasn't got that many problems with the breed at all.'<sup>12</sup>

Like George's breeder, others who feature in the programme also claim that the issue of disease in pedigree dogs has been blown out of all proportion. A breeder of Cavalier King Charles Spaniels argues that, 'They say scratching is a symptom [of syringomyelia] ... well, all dogs scratch.'<sup>13</sup> At the same time, however, the same breeder is adamant that she will never have her dogs MRI scanned to test for the condition.

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<sup>11</sup> Sampson, J. (2008) in *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*. Passionate Productions.

<sup>12</sup> Ellis, A. (2008) in *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*. Passionate Productions.

<sup>13</sup> Barwell, V. (2008) in *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*. Passionate Productions.



Some of the most notable aspects of the show-world revealed by *Pedigree Dogs Exposed* are the stigma, secrecy, and silence which ring-fence diseases in pedigree dogs from public discussion and thorough examination. The programme alleges that pet owners who buy their puppies from show-breeders are often not warned about diseases affecting their breeds, and likewise claims that owners who report incidents of disease to breeders are often ignored. Even more concerning for some viewers is the rarely talked about show-world practice which has been – and, in some breeds, remains – integral to the development and maintenance of Breed Standard-fitting show dogs: the culling of ‘healthy’, non-Standard-fitting puppies. The programme focuses on the example of the Rhodesian Ridgeback – a large breed which, show-world histories report, developed in Southern Africa, where Ridgebacks have traditionally been used as guarding and hunting dogs. As the Ridgeback Breed Standard declaims, the dog has a special feature known as ‘the escutcheon of the breed’ (Kennel Club, 1998:60), a ridge of hair along the spine which grows in the opposite direction to the rest of the coat. The ridge, the programme makers reveal, is only present in 95% of puppies, though, meaning that one in twenty will be born ridgeless and, in keeping with show-world tradition, are likely to be culled shortly after birth. More problematic still is the revelation that the ridge itself is, in fact, a pathological feature, linked with another ‘nasty condition’ known as dermoid sinus, which is accepted by breeders to be a mild form of spina bifida.<sup>14</sup> The RSPCA’s chief vet concludes that the ridge is a ‘deformity,’<sup>15</sup> which, as the documentary emphasises, leaves the Ridgeback vulnerable to a life of pain and suffering. Inevitably, Ridgeback breeders disagree. As the chairman of the Rhodesian Ridgeback breed club explains, ridgeless dogs might look perfectly healthy to the naive observer, but ‘in the breed... we feel that... [ridgeless dogs are] carrying a genetic fault.’<sup>16</sup> This view is so entrenched

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<sup>14</sup> See Barnes, L. ‘Dermoid Sinus, Ridgless and Culling’ <http://www.petresort.myzen.co.uk/diamondridgeridgebacks/Dermoid%20Sinus%20Ridgeless%20and%20Culling.htm> [Accessed 14/11/2014].

<sup>15</sup> Evans, M. (2008) in *Pedigree Dogs Exposed* (ibid.).

<sup>16</sup> Maidment, K. (2008) in *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*. Passionate Productions.

in the community that the breed club's *Code of Ethics* advises breeders that 'Ridgeless puppies shall be culled.'<sup>17</sup>



*Figure 3: Photo of Rhodesian Ridgebacks showing the characteristic 'ridge' along the dogs' spine.<sup>18</sup>*

How can it be, the documentary asks, that pedigree dog breeders have become so blinkered as to kill healthy puppies while purposefully propagating inheritable defects? As far as the RSPCA's chief vet is concerned, 'The cause is very simple. It is competitive dog showing. That is what has caused the problem.'<sup>19</sup> As the example of the Bulldog – that symbol of British pride and patriotism – illustrates, breeders' aims to out-do one another in the cut-throat world of the show-ring, combined with the vaguely worded and highly subjective descriptions laid down in Breed Standards, have led to the current situation in which breeds are dependent on substantial veterinary interventions to survive from one generation to the next. In their attempts to produce the 'massive' heads which have long been deemed indispensable by the Bulldog Breed Standard, breeders have pushed the breed to the point where, thanks to the mismatch between their pelvic capacity and the size of their puppies' heads, the majority of Bulldog

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<sup>17</sup> See *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*.

<sup>18</sup> From [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rhodesian\\_Ridgeback\\_ridges.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rhodesian_Ridgeback_ridges.jpg) [retrieved 20/07/2016].

<sup>19</sup> Evans, M. (2008) in *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*. Passionate Productions.

bitches are unable to give birth 'naturally'. Today, most breeders rely on vets to perform Caesarean sections (see also Evans & Adams, 2010). Ironically, historian David Hancock claims, while historical evidence suggests that the 'original' working Bulldogs of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were agile dogs with average-sized heads and minimal facial wrinkling, breeders are using the notion of 'tradition' and authenticity to justify the breed's now excessive proportions, and they are doing so even in the face of medical evidence that current-day Bulldog anatomy is causing the dogs harm.<sup>20</sup>

The programme claims that disease is rampant even in breeds which appear to be physically fit and healthy. The interviewed vets and geneticists agree that this is largely due to the fact that pedigree dogs are 'dangerously inbred'.<sup>21</sup> A study is cited in which scientists at Imperial College, London have recently found that:

'Pugs in the UK are so inbred, so related, that, although there are 10,000 of them, it's the equivalent of only 50 distinct individuals. And that makes Pugs more genetically compromised than the Giant Panda.'<sup>22</sup>

As a result, and in addition to breed-related conditions like Syringomyelia in the Cavalier, pedigree dog populations in general are beset by increasing levels of auto-immune disease and infertility which veterinary science links to inbreeding depression, and which have all proliferated due to repeated mating of closely-related individuals within closed gene pools. While show-breeders argue that the mating of close-relatives is vital to the project of pedigree dog breeding as a way of fixing and reproducing physical characteristics, eminent geneticist Professor Steve Jones warns that show-world practices of inbreeding are 'absolutely insane from the point of view of the health of the animal.'<sup>23</sup> Throughout, the message of the documentary is as stark as it is clear: breeders of pedigree dogs are willing to

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<sup>20</sup> Hancock, D. (2008) in *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*. Passionate Productions.

<sup>21</sup> Jones, S. (2008) in *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*. Passionate Productions.

<sup>22</sup> Harrison, (2008) in *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*. Passionate Productions.

<sup>23</sup> Jones, S. (2008) *ibid*.

overlook severe conformational and genetic health defects in their animals in order to adhere to the aesthetic standards of the show-ring.

The initial broadcast of the documentary attracts 3.9 million viewers<sup>24</sup> and sets off shockwaves that will reverberate through the show-world for years to come. In the immediate aftermath, the BBC terminates its coverage of Crufts – the Kennel Club’s largest annual dog show – ending a relationship which has spanned 42 years. Two of the UK’s leading animal welfare charities – the RSPCA and the Dogs Trust – also withdraw their support for Crufts, as do the show’s two primary sponsors, Pedigree Pet Foods and Hills Pet Nutrition (Bateson 2010:1). Independent inquiries into the practice of dog breeding are commissioned by the British Government, the RSPCA, and the Dogs Trust. Throwing further fuel on the fire, the official reports published soon thereafter support the overall argument made by *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*: the many and serious health and welfare problems in pedigree dogs are the result of selective breeding practices rooted in the ideology of the show-ring (Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare, 2009; Rooney & Sargan, 2009; Bateson, 2010).

In the show-world itself, the overwhelming reaction is of one anger, and in certain quarters even outrage. The Kennel Club’s managerial staff, a number of whom feature in *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*, issue statements claiming that the programme is highly biased and a threat to current work being done to improve pedigree dog health.<sup>25</sup> The documentary raises some valid points, these Kennel Club representatives acknowledge, yet, in their official opinion, the significance of health problems in pedigree dogs has been blown out of all proportion.<sup>26</sup> To mitigate this damage to their work and reputation, the Kennel Club joins forces

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<sup>24</sup> *The Guardian* (20/08/2008) ‘TV Ratings: Ohuruogu gold medal adds sparkle to BBC figures.’ <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2008/aug/20/tvratings.television> [accessed 30/06/2013]

<sup>25</sup> Kennel Club (20/08/2008) ‘Kennel Club Hits Back at BBC Dog Documentary.’ [http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/item/1995/pg\\_dtl\\_art\\_news/pg\\_hdr\\_art/pg\\_ftr\\_art](http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/item/1995/pg_dtl_art_news/pg_hdr_art/pg_ftr_art) [accessed 30/11/2009].

<sup>26</sup> *Dog World* (28/08/2008) ‘KC Chairman Hits Back.’ <http://www.dogworld.co.uk/News/35-KC-hits-back> [accessed 10/11/2009].

with the Dogs Trust to commission an independent report about pedigree dog breeding, and, in 2009, completes a review of all Breed Standards in which some are subject to as many as 60 changes.<sup>27</sup> Also in 2009, the Kennel Club joins forces with the Animal Health Trust (AHT) to establish the Kennel Club Genetics Centre which '[aims] to help breeders eradicate inherited disease from their breeds.'<sup>28</sup> In 2010, the Kennel Club produces a *Veterinary Practice Guide to Dog Health*, intended for distribution to all UK veterinary surgeries. The guide details the characteristics of each recognised breed and provides information on recommended health testing schemes in the hope of improving veterinary knowledge of pedigree dogs and improving relations between dog breeders and vets. Yet the biggest concession to the growing significance of veterinary medicine in show-world practice comes a year later when, in 2011, veterinary professor Steve Dean is elected to the most senior role in the organization: Chair of the Kennel Club's General Committee. Professor Dean's appointment seems to confirm a fear shared by many in the show-world, namely that a new era in dog breeding has arrived – one in which veterinary medicine is taking over as the primary source of practical, scientific, and moral authority in the care of pedigree dogs.

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This thesis is based on eighteen months of ethnographic research conducted in the British pedigree dog showing community between October 2011 and May 2013. My argument focuses on the tensions which – five years on from the broadcasting of *Pedigree Dogs Exposed* – continue to characterise the relationship between show-world and veterinary practice. These tensions are, I suggest, rooted in divergent show-world and veterinary concepts of what a dog is and what counts as health. In the show-world, breeders' understandings of health relate to their view of pedigree dogs as members of their breeds, and the bodies

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<sup>27</sup> *Dog World* (25/09/2009) 'New Breed Standards Agreed.'

<sup>28</sup> Kennel Club Genetics Centre (2014) 'Five Year Report: March 2009 – December 2013.' <https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/328960/KCGC%20Five%20year%20report%20FINAL.pdf%202013.pdf> [accessed 01/05/2015]

and behaviours of dogs are evaluated in relation to historically-specific notions of fitness and function. In veterinary medicine, on the other hand, the health of a pedigree dog is evaluated just like the health of any other dog; as an individual. In the veterinary view, breed-specific anatomical 'extremes' encouraged by Breed Standards are not features to be celebrated but problems to be remedied. Yet, as I argue, the fact that vets and breeders use the shared language of 'health' to refer to these very different concepts of what a dog should be puts them at cross-purposes. My concern is to demonstrate that, in both cases, situated understandings of what counts as a healthy dog imply specific duties of responsibility and care. In doing so, I hope to shed light on the reasons why, when the virtue of show-world practice is evaluated against veterinary standards of health, or vice versa, conflict ensues.

### A History of Tensions

The British preference for exaggeration and extremes of conformation in animal breeding has a long history. In 18<sup>th</sup> century England, 50 years before the first dog show was held, cattle breeding had already become a well-established hobby for the rural aristocracy. As historian Harriet Ritvo notes, like the dog breeders who would later adopt many of their values, most elite breeders and judges of cattle 'seemed to agree that the most impressive animals were those that pushed natural limits or approached unattainable ideals' (Ritvo 1987:56). Yet extreme conformation was not the only aspect of stock breeding that dog breeding would later mirror. Despite growing criticism of the problems associated with inbreeding, the view among livestock breeders was, Ritvo claims, that genealogical purity was of the greatest importance, and that 'distinguished lineage [...] should not be compromised for mere mongrel vigour' (Ritvo 1987:62). In contrast to the views of aristocratic breeders, the genealogical and physical qualities celebrated at livestock shows seem to have mystified many onlookers and commentators. As Ritvo reports '*Punch* [magazine] frequently remarked on the shortness of breath of the [prize-winning animals] and the difficulty they found in moving' (1987:75). By the 1830s, cattle show judges were

being reminded to reward moderation and soundness rather than gross exaggeration, but the problems persisted. As Jackie Turner reports, by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, livestock-shows still featured:

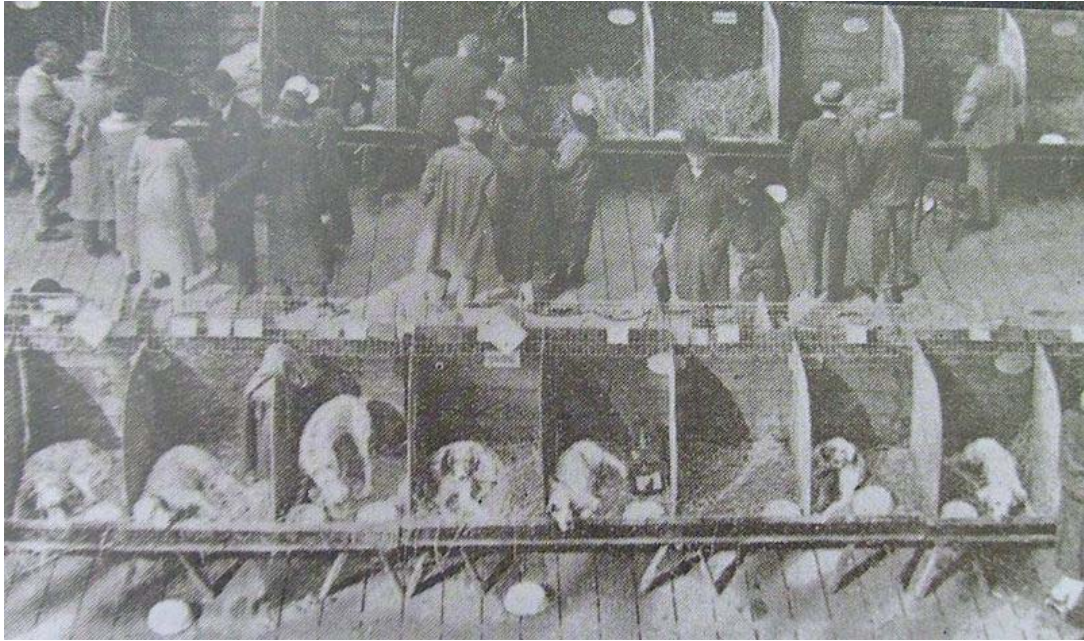
“‘Panting porkers, asthmatic sheep, and apoplectic oxen” as a result of a fashion for producing animals that were as large and fat as possible’ (Turner 2010:4, quoting Moncrieff 1996).

However, as a contributor to the *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England* observed in 1856:

‘More than half a century of serious criticism from clients and consumers had failed to erode the English high stock breeder’s affinity for portly beasts’ (cited in Ritvo 1987:76).

It was against this backdrop of aristocratic animal breeding and exhibition that the first formal dog show was held in Newcastle, England, in 1859. Among middle class Victorians the practices of showing and breeding ‘purebred’ dogs soon became popular pastimes. As Ritvo argues, in these early years dog breeding offered an alternative hobby to the livestock breeding dominated by rural elites. While livestock breeding affirmed the distinctions between the ‘well-bred’, landed aristocracy and all other social classes, the dog fancy offered members of the lower classes opportunities for social ascension. From the earliest days, the figurative elements of the dog fancy were important, Ritvo asserts, and the practice offered ‘a stable, hierarchical society, where rank was secure and individual merit, rather than just inherited position, appreciated’ (Ritvo, 1987:84). Despite its humble beginnings, participants in the pedigree dog fancy keenly embraced the ideologies of the British class system, and, while the community may have made room for human members from lower classes, it was much more exclusionary when it came to dogs.





*Figure 4: Crufts dog show in 1891. The picture presents a scene familiar from present-day dog shows, where dogs are housed on 'benches' while exhibitors observe and converse.<sup>29</sup>*

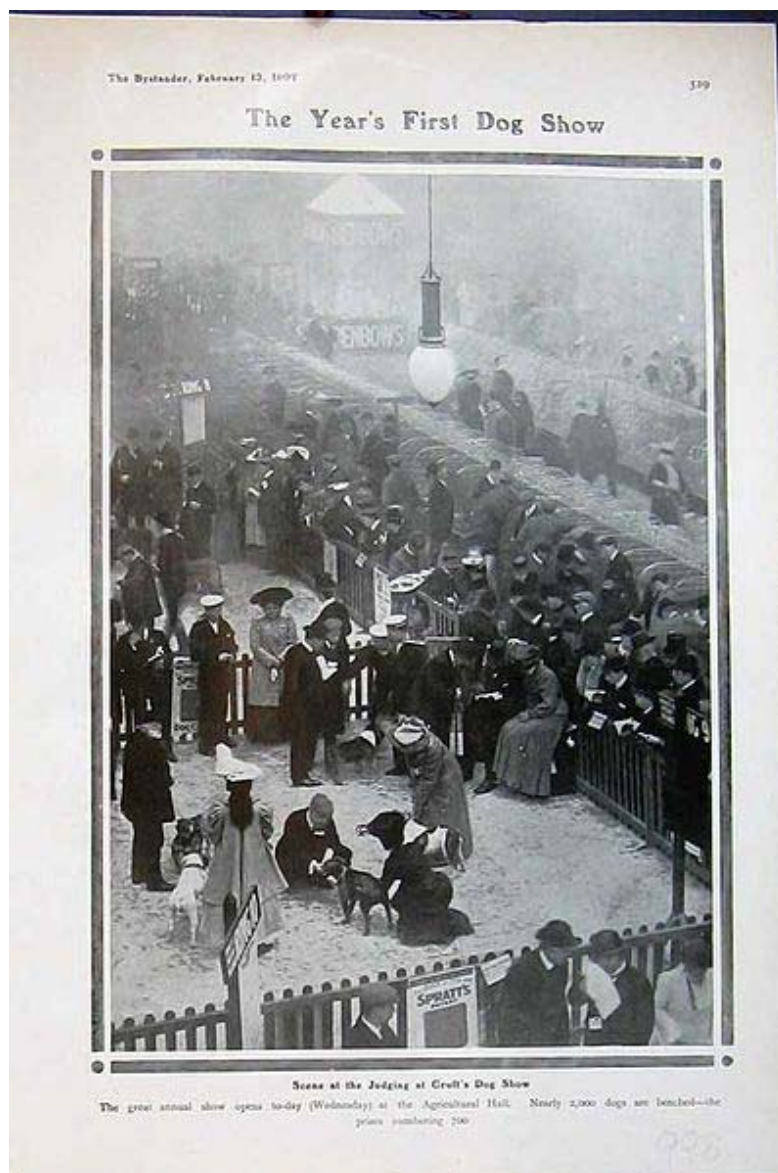
In 1873, the British Kennel Club was established as the first national pedigree dog breeding society in the world. In the early years of the dog fancy, the emphasis placed on the physical differences between breeds reflected the era's penchant for order and categorization of the natural world, and the formation of the Kennel Club reflected the perceived need for management and control of separate breed populations. The organisation quickly introduced a substantial set of dog show rules and regulations and by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had developed a system of governance which would soon be followed by emergent overseas dog showing organizations (Kennel Club, 2003). Central to this was the introduction of the club's policy of universal registration in 1880. From this point on, each dog entered in a Kennel Club-licensed dog show had to be registered with the organization under a unique name which would allow interested parties to trace the animal's ancestry and identify its breeder. With this policy of universal registration came the closed stud book; a list of every dog recognised as belonging to a given breed. These registers demarcated the boundaries of each population,

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<sup>29</sup> Photo from: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ACrufts\\_1891.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ACrufts_1891.jpg) [retrieved 20/07/2016]



ensuring a solid distinction between animals which the Kennel Club did and did not consider to be purebred. Ever since, every one of a dog's ancestors have had to be registered with the Kennel Club in order for the animal to qualify as a pedigree dog. As Ritvo (1987) has noted, with the official recognition of each breed, the dog showing community established a point before which all mixed breeding and genealogical complications could be forgotten and history could be re-written. Regardless of their prior biological or ancestral heritage, the foundation animals and all of their Kennel Club-registered descendants were considered purebred.



With the flourishing of the pedigree dog fancy came a flourishing of critical discourse around the breeding and showing of dogs. Just as the ideologies of the livestock fancy were mirrored in the ideologies of the emergent world of dog showing, so too complaints about the products of selective breeding seemed to transfer from one practice to the other. Even in the early days of the fancy, dog breeders were – like cattle breeders – accused of encouraging the development of traits which compromised the physical fitness of their animals. And just as outside observers were critical about show-breeders’ practices, show-breeders quickly took up an equally critical stance on what they perceived to be unnecessary external interference in show-world affairs (See Ritvo 1987; Turner 2010; Howell 2013). Looking back at events in the show-world during the First World War, historian Phillip Howell notes the extreme response of some pedigree dog breeders to public criticism of the continued breeding and exhibition of ‘luxury’ dogs. As Howell tells it, the then editor of *Our Dogs* newspaper, ‘allowed himself to believe that nothing less than the total extermination of dogs from the British Isles was envisioned’ (Howell 2013:557, quoting from *Our Dogs*, 1917). Generally speaking, Howell reports:

‘The agitation against dogs was portrayed by the fancy as motivated by the purest prejudice, the work of those for whom the war was simply an opportunity to indulge their inveterate hatred of dogs’ (Howell, 2013:558).

The tone of show-breeders’ relations with the general public was, it seemed, set early in the fancy’s history, and, as my own research suggests, seems to have changed little in the course of the hundred years that followed.

Yet while in later years, veterinary medicine would turn out be a significant source of criticism, histories of veterinary medicine suggest that the pedigree dog fancy emerged in an era when veterinary interest in small animals – including pedigree dogs – was minimal. As historians Neil Pemberton and Michael Worboys note:

‘Sustained professional practice with dogs did not develop until the second half of the twentieth century and before then ‘dog doctor’ was a term of abuse’ (2007:197. See also Gardiner, 2014).

While small animals might have featured in clinical encounters, until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the veterinary profession was primarily focused on horses and large stock animals (Woods & Mathews, 2010; Woods, 2012; Gardiner, 2014). The veterinary profession, it seems, played little more than a supportive role when it came to the breeding of pedigree dogs, at least until the post-war years brought with them a rapid rise in the use of motorised transport and a corresponding decline in horse populations (Swabe, 1999:80). As historians including Swabe (1999), Woods (2012), and Gardiner (2014) remind us, by the 1950s members of the veterinary profession were acutely aware of the pressing need to diversify and find new sources of employment and income which would make up for the decline in horses. In 1957, the British Small Animal Veterinary Association (henceforth BSAVA) was founded as more and more vets turned their attentions to the treatment of small animals. For the first time, dogs – including pedigree dogs – began to feature prominently in veterinary discourse and practice. Yet this new attention was not always positive. By the early 1960s, the BSAVA was sufficiently concerned about what it saw as inappropriate Breed Standards and inherited disorders in pedigree dogs to commission a survey assessing incidents of conditions which appeared to be hereditary. The findings were published in 1963 and formed the basis of a major symposium on *Abnormalities and Defects in Pedigree Dogs* at that year’s annual BSAVA Congress (see Hodgman, 1963; Nicolas et al., 2010:8).

So it was that, in step with the emergence of small-animal medicine, so too emerged new kinds of veterinary patients, and a new kind of veterinary authority over the health, care, and production of ‘pet’ animals, including pedigree dogs. Records from the show-world press suggest that pedigree dog breeders reacted with anger to the BSAVA’s involvement. As veterinary commentator and long-time associate of the Kennel Club, Mike Stockman, observed, the authors of an

academic paper based on the results of the BSAVA survey were soon extremely unpopular. And 'so, for that matter, was any veterinary surgeon who dared to express similar views ... "Speak when you're spoken to" was the theme of a number of communications aimed at the [vets]' (Stockman, 1984:573).

Yet despite breeders' protests, veterinary interest in the care and treatment of pedigree dogs continued to increase. The veterinary profession was 'swinging more and more towards the small animal section of its interests' (Stockman, 1984:573), and by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, veterinary involvement in the canine life-course had become the norm. Inextricably linked with the rise of small-animal veterinary medicine – and the primacy of veterinary science as a source of moral authority – came a substantial shift in the place of companion animals in British society. As Pemberton and Worboys observe, owners were becoming ever more financially and emotionally invested in their pets (2007:194). Companion animals – dogs, in particular – were now widely accepted as rights-bearing individuals, who, among other things, were seen to hold rights to life and good health. Correspondingly, the moral duties of dog owners and – significantly – dog breeders, had changed, but so too had the public image of pedigree dog breeding.

Breeders, ever quick to speak out against veterinary involvement in their practice, did not fare well under public scrutiny. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, veterinary medicine had become a scientific practice and science had taken centre-stage in increasingly secular Western societies as the ultimate source of rational knowledge (see Daston & Galison, 2007). The widespread public understanding was that health and disease could be recognised and measured in specific ways, but an in-depth knowledge of animal bodies required expertise in veterinary science. Pitted against veterinary medicine, dog breeders were often viewed as irrational and misguided, if not dangerously ignorant. Dog breeding for the show-ring was framed as a problem to be dealt with: an archaic practice perpetrated by a particularly retrograde sector of society which preferred to cling to tradition, rather than embrace 'progress'. In time, this framing not only

reaffirmed the authority of veterinary medicine, but also further legitimised the veterinary right to intervene in animals' bodies as well as in breeders' practices.

### The Show-World

Veterinary medicine and public attitudes to pet-keeping have changed substantially since the 1950s, but so too has life in the show-world. Show-kennels are not what they once were. While dog showing has always been inclusive of the middle and working classes, the show-world has nonetheless – for much of its history – been dominated by the large-scale kennels of the rather well-heeled. Kennels of more than 50 dogs were not uncommon in the post-war years, but today the majority of people who exhibit dogs in the show-ring are small-scale breeders from the working and lower-middle classes whose 'kennels' are the front rooms of their sub-urban homes. In practical terms, many show dogs now appear to be kept as 'pets', at least in ideological terms, yet their breeders and owners continue to embrace long-standing practices, traditions, and relational perspectives of the show-world.

Changes have also been made at the Kennel Club, which remains the main governing body and source of authority in the show-world. In recent years the organization has become increasingly politically active, campaigning against puppy farming and the dog meat trade, and working with the UK government and national and local charities to improve the welfare and well-being of all dogs. Through its Charitable Trust, the organization now makes substantial financial contributions towards research into canine health, particularly genetic research into the problems of inheritable disease. But despite its recent diversification, the Kennel Club's primary function remains the regulation of pedigree dog breeding, and the organization still generates most of its income from the registration of puppies (Kennel Club, 2013b:26). After all, from its inception, the Kennel Club's registration system has worked to sort and classify purebred dogs and, over 100 years later, the same regulatory principles and practices continue to govern pedigree dog breeding. Today, the show-world remains focused on statistics,

measurements, and data, and the Kennel Club continues to record the birth date, sex, colour, breeder, and owner, of all registered pedigree dogs. By 2011, the results of medical tests and the number of offspring a dog produces are also routinely added to these records which, along with the pedigrees of all registered dogs, are publically available through the Kennel Club website and the organisations' paper publications.

To this day, classification focuses first and foremost on a dog's breed. In keeping with a long-standing system, each of the 210 breeds recognised by the Kennel Club is classified as belonging to one of seven groups. These group classifications are less to do with biological taxonomy than with the original purpose or function of dog breeds. In other words, breeds are classified according to their economic and social role as recorded in historical accounts. As the Kennel Club tells it, the Gundog breeds 'were originally trained to find live game and/or to retrieve game that had been shot and wounded'; the Hound breeds 'originally used for hunting either by scent or by sight'; those in the Pastoral group were herding breeds 'associated with working cattle, sheep, reindeer and other cloven footed animals'; the Terrier breeds were 'originally bred and used for hunting vermin'; Toy breeds were 'small companion or lap dogs'; the Working breeds 'bred to become guards and search and rescue dogs'; and, finally, those in the Utility group were 'miscellaneous breeds ... selectively bred to perform a specific function not included in the sporting and working categories.'<sup>30</sup> Pedigree dogs, then, have always been classified in the show-world according to their relationships with humans, not according to what veterinary science might view as the 'objective' taxonomic status of the dogs themselves.

By 2012, the Kennel Club claims that around 35,000 people are registering litters with the British Kennel Club each year – equating to the annual registration of around 250,000 pedigree dogs.<sup>31</sup> Importantly, only dogs registered with the

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<sup>30</sup> Kennel Club (2014) 'Breed Standards' <http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/activities/dog-showing/breed-standards/> [accessed 11/2/2014]

<sup>31</sup> Quoting Bill Lambert, Kennel Club Health and Breeder Services Manager, speaking at a seminar in Inverness, 24/03/2012.

Kennel Club are eligible for entry into dog shows licensed by the organisation, a rule which, from the early years of dog showing, has established a fundamental divide between dogs who count in the show-world and those who don't (Ritvo, 1987; Turner, 2010). Despite the recent controversy over pedigree dogs and growing public concern about high rates of inbreeding and genetic disease, Kennel Club registration remains the gold standard of quality in the minds of many puppy buyers and dog owners, and although virtually all litters bred by show-breeders are registered by the Kennel Club, not all Kennel Club-registered litters are bred by show-breeders. Instead, the vast majority of Kennel Club registered dogs are bred by 'pet owners', hobby breeders, and commercial breeders – or, as the latter are known in the show-world, 'puppy farmers'.

At the time of my fieldwork, a Kennel Club representative claims that less than 2% of all registered dogs will ever be exhibited in a dog show.<sup>32</sup> In 2013, this equates to an estimated 57,000 dogs entered into one or more of over 3000 Kennel Club-licensed dog shows,<sup>33</sup> most of which are organised by one of the circa 2,000 local, regional, or breed-specific dog show clubs active in the UK.<sup>34</sup> These 57,000 active show-dogs are owned by the approximately 30,000 people who attend dog shows on a regular or semi-regular basis, although not all of these people are committed long-term breeders or exhibitors. The Kennel Club claims to see many breeders cycle through breeds, which suggests that many breeders become actively involved in a breed for 5 or 6 years and then either move on to another or withdraw completely from showing and breeding pedigree dogs. Yet while they may be in the minority, at the heart of the show-world remains a substantial number of breeders who have made a long-term commitment, if not to one particular breed then to the pedigree dog fancy at large. Certainly, not all of these long-term members of the show-world are actively breeding dogs – some breed only two or three litters in the course of a career spanning many decades –

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with Bill Lambert, Kennel Club Health and Breeder Services Manager (October 2011) At the Kennel Club Building, Clarges Street, London

<sup>33</sup> Channel 4 (5/3/2013) *Show Dogs: the Road to Crufts*

<sup>34</sup> Personal communication with the KC, October 2011



but a substantial number breeds a litter every year or two. Meanwhile, a few large show-kennels which house in excess of 30 dogs continue to produce multiple litters each year, some shipping puppies produced by their Champion breeding stock all over the world.



*Figure 6: A partial view of one of the eight halls at Birmingham's NEC Arena given-over to Crufts dog show each March. Out of sight here are the show-rings, which are hidden from view by trade-stalls selling dog-related products as well as clothes and household wares at what is now a highly-commercialised event.*

At some point, most members of the show-world who sustain careers as exhibitors and breeders will think about becoming dog show judges. Indeed, the vast majority of well-known show-world 'personalities' have achieved success in all three roles, and most other breeders and exhibitors aspire to emulate their success. Reflecting this conflation of roles and responsibilities, well-known faces in the show-world are unfailingly well-connected to other high-flyers, to the point where nepotism is widely accepted as an inevitable part of life, even at an organisational level. The Kennel Club, for instance, is at heart an exclusive members club, wherein decisions about the future management and governance of dog breeding are made by a 1,200-strong membership comprising the great



and the good of dog-breeding society. In keeping with tradition, entry to the Kennel Club remains meritocratic, rather than democratic, and potential newcomers can only be nominated by existing members. Once a person's contribution to the fancy has been assessed and deemed significant enough to warrant consideration, nominees are invited to lunch with the Kennel Club's General Committee, who observe and evaluate nominated candidates and decide whether or not they are to be granted membership. In 1973, the previously male-only club opened its doors to women, who by then constituted the overwhelming majority of exhibitors and breeders, although Connaught Lodge, a Masonic Chapter was still comprised exclusively of Kennel Club members, remains strictly men-only.<sup>35</sup> By 2011, this gender imbalance among Kennel Club members had been successfully redressed, yet membership remains significantly skewed towards older breeders. Not only does the wider show-world appear to be in or past middle-age, many Kennel Club members are now well into their seventies, eighties and beyond.

Aside from the changes in gender relations, the balance of power has remained relatively stable for most of show-world history. Senior breeders dominate winners' podiums, judging tables, and committee benches right across the community, their authority shored-up by a class-infused show-world ideology which assumes the natural superiority of those who hold long-standing connections to other well-placed individuals and well-bred dogs. Perhaps unsurprisingly, breeders invariably introduce themselves by remarking on their years spent owning and breeding dogs, the extent of their judging credentials, and their memberships of various breed-club committees. In recent years, however, the show-world has undergone substantial change. For one thing, the development of the Internet has democratised access to information about dog breeding, previously a key currency in show-world economies of status. In other words, knowledge about pedigree dogs is no longer the preserve of the

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<sup>35</sup> For more information, see *Freemasonry Today* (06/03/2014) 'the Kennel club and Connaught Lodge No 3270.' <http://www.freemasonrytoday.com/news/lodges-chapters-a-individuals/the-kennel-club-connaught-lodge-no-3270-graham-hill> [accessed 08/12/2015]

experienced breeder, a guarded secret only to be handed down to the deserving novice.

Along with the development of online communications, new veterinary scientific knowledge about disease – in particular, genetics and the heritability of disease – has been emerging at a rapid pace. As Donna Haraway's (2008) work on pedigree dog breeding in the USA attests, the internet now provides a powerful and popular means for interested parties to disperse and discuss information about pedigree dog health. These changes give rise not only to new forms of practice, but also to new types of pedigree dog breeders and owners, most notably those who prioritise veterinary notions of health and disease. To some extent, it seems, these new forms of knowledge and communication have merged with established show-world relations. In many subtle ways a breeder's engagement with canine disease has come to reorder his or her status and authority in the community. Yet while biomedical and genetic knowledge have become the focus in some corners of the show-world, I argue that the majority of breeders' engagements with these topics remain superficial, to the point where many in the show-world are keen to ignore or suppress emergent knowledge of disease. It is these self-proclaimed Champions of show-world tradition who form the focus of my research.

This is not to say that the current state of affairs is necessarily due to a complete disinterest among the majority of breeders. Instead, I suggest, show-world conflicts are largely due to the incompatible nature of veterinary-scientific and show-world concepts of pedigree dog health. Fundamental to show-world ideologies is the knowledge that traditional practices such as inbreeding are at once key to producing Breed Standard-fitting dogs, and vital in protecting breeds from the threat of genetic contamination, which, many breeders argue, might increase levels of inheritable disease. Veterinary science, on the other-hand, posits that inbreeding is itself the cause of most health problems in pedigree dogs, which is at odds with the notion that health can be achieved by producing canine bodies that fit with the idealised images described in Breed Standards. In short,

show-world practice is characterised by, and torn between, two conflicting concepts of health and care.

It is this very conflict between show-world traditions and veterinary bio-scientific approaches to health which was brought to public attention by 2008's *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*. The criticisms that the programme levels at breeders draws on bio-scientific knowledge and serves to highlight the fact that breeders and vets take a different view of health. Underlying the arguments put forward by both show-breeders and their critics is the question of whether health should be approached with reference to dogs as individuals or as members of their breeds. After all, the 'healthy' Rhodesian Ridgebacks puppies that vets had accused breeders of needlessly culling might have been healthy dogs, but the lack of a ridge meant that, as far as breeders were concerned, they were not healthy Ridgebacks.

### [Pedigree Dogs: Responsibility, ethics, and care](#)

In this thesis, I argue that show-world and veterinary practices relate to divergent and conflicting concepts of health. In doing so, I examine what exactly breeders and vets mean when they talk about a healthy pedigree dog, which in turn will shed light on how different understandings of health relate to specific, situated notions of responsibility, ethics, and care both in the show-world and in the veterinary clinic. In essence, my argument relates to a profound confusion about the use of 'ordinary language' – a problem identified by both Wittgenstein (2009 [1953]) and Austin (1961) as emerging from the divergent use of common terms. In this case, I argue that vets and show-breeders tend to take the terms 'health', 'fitness', and 'dog' to mean very different things. When it comes to pedigree dog health, I extend this argument to demonstrate how show-breeders and their veterinary critics are not relating differently to shared concepts, but rather that they are working within conceptual systems that are fundamentally different. Attendant upon these specific concepts of health are particular obligations and responsibilities which are, in many cases, ethically incommensurable with the

responsibilities recognised in alternate conceptual systems. In short, obligations to care for pedigree dogs are not absolute and shared, but rather practice-specific and contingent on a particular view of what counts as a healthy dog.

More broadly speaking, my work examines the different ways in which 'people are trying to do what they consider to be right or good [and] are being evaluated according to criteria of what is right or good' (Lambek, 2010:1). Hence, questions of morality and ethics are central to the specific case studies as well as to the wider discourses investigated in this thesis. Like many other anthropologists (for example, Lambek, 2010), I do not draw a hard distinction between morals and ethics, except to suggest that morals tend to be more formalised notions of what is right, while ethics address the question of what is good. In particular, my interest in the 'ordinary language' of the show-world is predicated on an approach to the issue perhaps best expressed by Michael Lambek, who suggests that:

'We may find the wellspring of ethical insight deeply embedded in the categories and functions of language use and ways of speaking ... in the commonsense ways we distinguish among various kinds ... thus in the shared criteria we use to make ourselves intelligible to one another in "what we say when"' (Lambek, 2010:2, drawing on Austin, 1961).

Ongoing tensions between veterinary and show-world practice mean that my work largely focuses on situations in which ethics are made explicit – in which conflicts arise between what does or does not count as good, responsible care. Yet at other times, my work also attends to the more mundane and 'ordinary' aspects of life in which a specific ethics is made manifest in daily practice, 'without calling undue attention to itself' (Lambek, 2010:2). Inspired by the work of Veena Das (2015), I also address the fact that events which may appear to be extraordinary and untenable are often quickly incorporated into people's mundane attempts to live with suffering and affliction on a daily basis.

So it is in the company of academics like James Laidlaw (2010; 2014) and Adam Reed (2015) – anthropologists who have recently begun to consider the centrality of ethics in human life – that I explore the notion that ‘anthropological attention should not fall just on an ethical self-fashioning ... but also upon the ethical as a modality of practice and action’ (Reed, 2015:3). This question, however, prompts another: Is it enough to approach conflicting ethics of care merely in relation to divergent ways of speaking or thinking about canine bodies? Commenting on developments in human-focused medical anthropology, Shigehisa Kuriyama argues that doing so is ‘merely to restate the problem’. Instead, Kuriyama suggests that:

‘The challenge lies precisely in coming to terms with what we mean by “different ways of thinking.” *In what sense* do people think differently? What meaning can be given to the explanation, “They had different conceptions of the body?” How literally are we to construe the phrase, “They saw things differently”?’ (2007 [1987]:595 *italics as in original*).

By this reckoning, an enquiry into divergent understandings of the canine body becomes ‘an inquiry into the possible realms of human experience’ (Kuriyama 2007 [1987]:601; See also Harris & Robb 2012). Anthropologists interested in this sort of phenomenological engagement, chief among them Tim Ingold (2000) and Cristina Grasseni (2004, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c), ask how practical engagements with the world shape people’s perceptions of their environment. As Grasseni argues, specific forms of practice:

‘Can cradle and nurture social and cognitive skills, habits and attitudes, value-laden stances, emotional patterns and engrained beliefs etc. thus defining the boundaries of what we can consider a form of life’ (Grasseni, 2007a:204).

Of particular note with regard to my own work is Grasseni’s suggestion that the significance of practice quickly becomes apparent when we pay attention to the different ways in which people learn to look at the world, in terms of both ‘what is ‘good’ looking (in the sense of a good way of looking at something) and what is

good to look at' (Grasseni, 2007a:204). As she argues, looking can be an embodied skill rather than merely a simple reflex. What is more, Grasseni claims, the process of learning to look is practice-specific. It involves learning to amalgamate aesthetic and moral judgements into bodily sensibilities – important observations in the case of pedigree dog health, where both show-world and veterinary assessments primarily rely on visual appraisal of the canine body.

In both pedigree dog breeding and veterinary practice, learning to skilfully observe the canine body is, I argue, fundamental to the provision of good care, despite the fact that care in these respective practices takes very different forms. Here, my argument is informed by the work of Donna Haraway (2008) and Hans Harbers (2010), who suggest that;

'What humans are, and what animals are (person, property, machine, creature with consciousness or feeling – whatever) is not predefined but is given shape in [the course of] interaction' (Harbers, 2010:145).

My own contribution to this discussion is to suggest that the ways in which humans and dogs are 'given shape' differ radically in show world and veterinary practice – that is, the way in which breeders and vets understand what counts as good is practice-specific. Like Dana Atwood-Harvey (2003, 2005) Donna Haraway (2008), Hans Harbers (2010), and Adam Reed (2015, 2016) I take the view that, especially in the ethics of animal care, 'virtues do not depend on a specific morality but on a particular form of engagement in practice' (Fassin, 2014). Nor, for that matter, do ethical obligations toward animals depend on blanket notions of animal rights as defined by species membership. Rather, ethical responsibilities – and peoples' abilities to respond – emerge from the connections that develop in the course of lived relations with specific animals and animal collectivities. Here, I build on Haraway's notion of 'mattering', in which beings are made materially and morally significant in the course of their interactions with other beings and things (Haraway, 2008:71). As Veena Das notes of health practitioners – and which I argue to be the case for breeders and vets – understanding of what is at stake in caring encounters are:

‘embedded in complex understandings of what is normal and what is critical; what is medicine and what is poison ... what is the work of human hands and what is the grace of the divine’ (2015:204).

Like Haraway (2008) and Harbers, (2010) my work likewise supports Das’ conviction that ‘these criteria constitute the kind of judgements that are grown within forms of life and not from abstract principles of moral philosophy or bioethics’ (2015:204). In sum, I argue that different practices of animal care inform specific ethics of relating, which in turn support and enable the provision of care in particular ethical forms – a claim which aligns my argument with a larger body of work on the ethics of care and in so doing stresses the fact that, ‘in practice, principles are rarely productive. Instead local solutions to specific problems need to be worked out’ (Mol et al., 2010:13).

When it comes to the show-world, I argue that virtue is to be found in particular forms of relating to pedigree dogs as members of their breeds, and likewise to breeds as populations of pedigree dogs. I argue that breeders’ ability to maintain ‘affective distance’ is key to maintaining perspective of the dog as a breed member, rather than as an individual. Here, I contribute to a conversation among scholars who argue for ‘a reconsideration of the productive potential of disconnection, distance and detachment as ethical, methodological, and philosophical commitments’ (Candea et al., 2015:1. See also Atwood-Harvey, 2003, 2005; Candea, 2010, 2013a, 2013b; Crowder, 2015). Yet rather than focus on the notion of detachment, which necessarily places the conversation in a framework of prior engagement, I suggest that breeders are less concerned with detaching from previously close relations than they are with maintaining affective distance between themselves and their dogs, and, indeed, their breeds. My argument is that skilled breeding requires the cultivation that Cristina Grasseni (2004, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c) has termed ‘skilled vision’ – in this case, the ability to ‘see’ and evaluate the body of a dog in relation to the idealised image of its breed. Here, I relate my own observations to those made by Rane Willerslev (2007a), which in turn support my claim that show-world emphasis on distance

as a means to gaining perspective is also used in a figurative sense. Laying credence to this claim, I reveal the ways in which show-world tradition impels breeders to 'take the long view', how it conditions them to temper their affective inclinations to care for their dogs as individuals – inclinations which might otherwise be detrimental to the long-term wellbeing of their breeds.

Both with regard to veterinary and show-world practice, my research suggests that care is inherently instrumental. Like Giraud and Hollin, I argue against the view that 'the value of care lies in its capacity to combat instrumentalisation through creating space to affect and be affected' (Giraud & Hollin, 2016:30). Rather, I suggest, good care in the show-world often relies on affect being managed and limited, and breeders' ability to hold dogs at an affective distance is not, as critics might suggest, a sign that they are uncaring. Instead, I argue, those breeders who fail to maintain an appropriate affective distance between themselves and their dogs are seen as unable to provide the care that pedigree dogs require as members of their breeds. The importance of this affective distance becomes evident in the view which show-world traditionalists take of pet owners, who are seen to attribute excessive affective significance to individual dogs. This is not to say that the care which pet owners provide is universally seen as bad, but, in many cases, it is seen as somewhat inappropriate. Their close affective relations with their pets leave pet owners unable to perceive the needs of the animal *as a pedigree dog*. The majority of pet owners are seen to care for dogs as furry child-substitutes, rather than as what the show-world sees them: members of breeds.

Importantly, most show-breeders do not see the need to care for the well-being of pedigree dogs and their breeds as a source of tension. My argument here builds on work by Hans Harbers (2010), Alex Blanchette (2015), and Kim Crowder (2015), all of whom point to a collapsing of the separate categories of individual and collective in animal husbandry practices, wherein care for the multiple implies care for its constituent elements, and vice versa. This runs counter to the perspective of most vets, critics of the show-world, and advocates of animal



welfare who have, for some time, voiced their concerns that, when the wellbeing of the collective is prioritised, individual health and welfare inevitably suffers (Serpell 1995; Milne, 2007; Brandow, 2013). In counterpoint to this consensus, those in the show-world tend to consider the health of dog and breed to be mutually contingent in that a healthy dog is one which fits its Breed Standard and can thus be considered fit to fulfil the original function of its breed. Good care in the show-world, then, isn't so much about weighing-up the needs of the particular dog against the needs of the collective; in good show-world care, the needs of each are met by caring well for one or the other – that is, by caring for breeds as populations of pedigree dogs, and pedigree dogs as members of their breeds. Once again, then, the maintenance of an appropriate affective distance from both dog and breed proves to be key to the breeder's duty of care, particularly when care for pedigree dogs and breeds involves practices which might be viewed as harmful when evaluated against the welfare of the individual dog. Here, I draw on work by John Law (2010), Hans Harbers (2010), Lisa Stevenson (2014), and Kim Crowder (2015), which examines how, in practice, care may be uncoupled from ceaseless efforts to prevent all forms of pain or suffering and see care, instead, as an instrumental practice which often requires the utilitarian weighing-up of harm and benefit. Again, my argument here is tied to the issue of distance and the breeders' ability to assess what constitutes harm, not in relation to the individual, but rather to the dog as a member of its breed.

The maintenance of an appropriate 'affective distance' from both dog and breed is, then, a mark of both moral virtue and practical skill in the show-world. Exploring this counter-intuitive concept of care leads my work into the wider current discourse on care which, as Elana Buch observes;

'emphasizes the ways that daily care practices are both moral and embodied, the diverse forms of attunement and intersubjectivity crafted through care practices, and the ways that care practices are embedded within particular social and institutional contexts' (Buch 2015:282. See also Mol et al., 2010).

From the outset of my own argument, I follow Michael Lambek (2000) in drawing attention to two overlapping qualities of moral virtuousness and embodied virtuosity, both of which, I suggest, are key to ethical evaluations of show-world and veterinary practices of care. Virtuosity refers to a talent or skill in a specific practice and the refined ability to appreciate objects of virtue: that is, objects created at the hands of skilled craftspeople. Breeders, then, are virtuosos of their practice, well-bred dogs are objects of virtue, and good dogs as well as good breeders possess the quality of virtuosity. Virtuousness, on the other hand, refers to the quality of being virtuous in the moral sense. In the show-world and in veterinary practice, virtuosity – the skilled, valued engagement in certain forms of practice – is ethically virtuous. When I speak of breeders' 'virtuosity', therefore, I am not only acknowledging their skilled craftsmanship and ability to appreciate the bodies of pedigree dogs as objects of rare beauty; I am also signalling the ethical virtue which emerges from practice undertaken with these particular skills. I argue that, in the show-world, it is the perceived virtuosity of their skilled practices of care which make breeders – and the dogs they produce – 'good'. Likewise, in veterinary medicine, the perceived skill and moral righteousness of a vet's practice signals his or her virtuosity. As I argue throughout, though, the fact that each practice relates to a different concept of health means that breeders and vets often find difficulty in appreciating the skill and the moral righteousness – and so the virtuosity – of the other's practice.

One of the most significant skills which breeders develop, I argue, is the ability to cultivate the bodies of dogs to the point at which they fit with Breed Standards. Yet vets, too, are involved in the attempt to realise their own practice-specific images of healthy canine bodies. In both cases, therefore, the forms these practices take shape the way breeders and vets conceptualise their responsibilities towards the dogs in their care. In discussing the notion of responsibility, I engage with work by James Laidlaw which argues that notions of who or what can be held 'responsible' for particular actions or events depends on the distribution of agency as perceived by the observer. As Laidlaw argues, the attribution of agency to being or thing:

'Needs to be explained in terms of their contingent relations and interactions, rather than a postulated inner quality of which they can be said to have more or less' (2010:146).

The point here is that discussions of agency tend to focus on Bruno Latour's (2005) Actor Network Theory analysis, in which objects are conceived of as either 'intermediaries' which effect change only by 'passing on' the agency of other actors, or as 'mediators', which hold their own agency and are seen as actors in their own right. Laidlaw points out that agency is not inherent but always attributed by the observer – a fact which, he argues, is fundamental to the way we think about causation and the distribution of responsibility. His claim is that whether or not a person or thing can be held responsible for an action depends on whether or not they are considered to be mediators or intermediaries of agency. In my own work, Laidlaw's argument is important in as much as it highlights the way in which breeders – and, indeed, vets – think about their own agency, the agency of canine bodies, and the attribution of responsibility for states of health and disease in pedigree dogs.

My argument is that, as far as many show-breeders are concerned, the bloodlines and/or genes of pedigree dogs are intermediaries through which the agency of other actors leads to anatomical change in future generations of dog. The skill of a breeder's practice is evident in their ability to cultivate the bodies of dogs through the channelling of their own agency, to the effect that the breeder is able to manipulate and combine certain inheritable qualities. Skilled breeders are therefore perceived to be responsible for the production of Standard-fitting, 'well-bred' dogs. Conversely, breeders lacking in virtuosity are deemed unable to successfully channel their own agency to bring about positive change in the bodies of the dogs they breed. And yet, I argue, breeders are not the only actors whose agency is seen to shape pedigree dogs. Crucially, in the show-world 'nature' is perceived as a competing actor and force for change. This is not, I stress, a discussion about a nature/culture dichotomy. Rather, I refer to show-breeders' own – admittedly vague – concepts of nature as a forceful entity which

exerts varying degrees of control on the bodies of pedigree dogs. The important distinction is that breeders do not perceive themselves as the only actors whose agency shapes the bodies of pedigree dogs, and so do not see themselves as responsible for all the outcomes of their practice. According to their rationale, the bodies of dogs are sites in which struggles between breeders and the forces of nature play out. At times, breeders are able to work *with* nature in order to produce canine bodies which they consider to be healthy and Standard-fitting, and for which they are happy to claim responsibility. At other times, however, breeders are acutely aware of their inability to compete with nature's force of change which may manifest in incidents of disease. Thus, breeders do not necessarily see themselves as responsible for bringing about disease. Instead, they widely perceive incidents of disease as unfortunate but somewhat inevitable manifestations of natural forces beyond their control.

This partial abdication of responsibility notwithstanding, I argue that the concept of pedigree dogs as the intermediaries for the actions of others is of central significance to most breeders' self-image and indeed to a full understanding of their human-animal relations. I return to Haraway's concept of mattering and the claim that beings become 'significant' in and through specific connections with other beings. My claim is that the show-world view of the dog's genes as intermediaries of competing sources of agency – and the canine body as the material site in which struggles between breeders and nature play out – encourages breeders to view dogs themselves as relatively passive objects. This perspective, I argue, enables breeders to accord dogs rather little affective significance, which is to say that breeders treat dogs not as subjects who have affective potential in-and-of-themselves. Rather, I suggest, they tend to treat them as objects with little to no affective significance, and it is this treatment that allows most breeders to maintain the affective distance to dogs-as-individuals which is widely seen as necessary to ensure the virtuosity of show-world care for pedigree dogs and their breeds. Fundamentally, I maintain, breeders tend to view their responsibilities not as lying in the care of individual dogs, but in the simultaneous care of pedigree dogs and their breeds. As for the moral framework

of these notions of responsibility and care, I argue that they relate to a practice-specific concept of health which centres on the notion that a healthy dog is one which fits its Breed Standard, and a healthy breed is one made up of Standard-fitting dogs. In short, as far as most breeders are concerned, the health of dogs and breeds are effectively one and the same.

### The Ethics of Care across Species Lines

One of the central questions of this thesis is, of course, ‘the question of the animal’. Thanks to the ground-breaking work of Donna Haraway (2003; 2008) and others who have risen to the challenge of taking anthropology across species lines, the discipline at large is now starting to look, as Eduardo Kohn (2014) has put it, ‘beyond the human’, recognising the possibility that the process of ‘becoming with’ may transgress the boundaries between human and non-human life (See, for example, Mullin, 1999; Knight, 2005; Cassidy & Mullin, 2007; Kohn, 2007; Willerslev, 2007b; Fuentes, 2010; Kirksey and Helmreich 2010; Song, 2010; Candea 2010, 2013a, 2013b; Locke, 2013; Dave, 2014; Hartigan Jr 2015; Lien, 2015). Yet as much as current approaches to multispecies anthropology emphasise the need to decentralise the human, in the case of my own work, the fact remains that both British dog showing and British veterinary practice are – despite the presence of animals – highly anthropocentric. Reflecting the wider social contexts in which these practices develop, both evince deeply entrenched notions about supposed differences between humans and other species. Indeed, it may well be argued that, for many, the success of show-world and veterinary practice is not determined by relations with animals as individuals but by the triumph of human agency and the potential to effect change in non-human life forms. It is for this reason that, through my own work, I reiterate a caution issued by Joanne Latimer (2013), who urges recognition of the fact that our relationships with other species do not often constitute the human-animal hybrids suggested by Haraway’s notion of ‘becoming with’ other species. Rather, Latimer offers the notion of ‘being alongside’, which she conceives of ‘as a form of relations that preserves a sense of difference at the same time as it performs

partial connectedness and mutuality' (2013:99). After all, Latimer argues, human connections with other beings are often partial and intermittent, and the vast majority of anthropologists live and work in societies where the divisions and distances between species are central to the way people think about and encounter life. Fundamentally, as Samantha Hurn argues, 'an anthropocentric focus is something to be expected from *anthropologists*' (2010:27). Certainly, my own interest lies in the ways in which show-breeders and vets experience their interactions with dogs, and how these experiences shape their understandings of themselves as responsible, responsive, ethical subjects.

To be clear, the principles of separation and improvement predominate both veterinary and show-world practice. As Bamford and Leach (2009) point out, these principles are reflections of the 'genealogical paradigm'; a way of thinking about and organizing the world rooted in the way Western society thinks about and organizes relationships between people. The notion of heredity, and the principles of 'sequence, essence, and transmission,' are all key to the way Western society understands kinship. Hence, as Bamford and Leach argue, they are explicit in our ways of '...organizing knowledge about the world,' and implicit in the structure of 'those social institutions and relations that give our social world its form and meaning' (Bamford & Leach 2009:2). The genealogical paradigm is, they suggest, crucial to understandings 'of race, personhood, ethnicity, property relations, and the relationship between humans beings and other species' (Bamford & Leach 2009:2), for while this way of thinking creates connections, it also gives rise to separations and divisions.

Genealogies and genealogical thinking are central in show-world practice. Pedigree charts, closed stud books, and Breed Standards all testify to the genealogical presupposition that 'the world is populated by various categories of beings, each hermetically sealed in a constitutive sense from all others' (Bamford 2009:160). Beyond the obvious effects, genealogical conceptions of life extend far beyond canine forms, naturalising certain relations among members of both human and non-human species. I argue that the genealogical thinking which

prevails in the show-world supports not the conventional notion that kinship crosses species lines, but instead the counter-intuitive idea that there is virtue to be found in the careful maintenance of affective distance. Crucially, however, I suggest that in the show-world distance is seen to enhance, rather than limit, breeders' abilities to recognise their responsibilities and provide good care. As Annemarie Mol and her colleagues have argued in studies of care which cross species lines, 'The point is not to preach equality, but to attend to everybody's specificities and to the relations in which we make each other be' (Mol et al., 2010:15). Like Latimer, I stress the 'possibility of dwelling with non-humans as preserving division and alterity as much as connectivity and unity' (Latimer, 2013:98). My own approach has been to look for these partial and intermittent connections so as to consider how their appearances and disappearances shape forms of life and practices of care.

## Methodology

Fieldwork for my doctoral project began in October of 2011. Previously, I had spent a number of years conducting ethnographic research among pedigree dog-focused communities. While I do not consider myself a 'dog person', it was a personal connection which, in the course of my undergraduate studies, sparked my interest in the lives of sled dogs and their owners. Prior to writing my undergraduate thesis, I spent a year living and working at a kennel which housed 10 sled dogs, a period in which I became an active member of the dry-land sled dog racing community. While my interest, at that point, was in the working side of these breeds, many of the dogs were considered 'dual-purpose' animals, which is to say that, unlike most, they were both working dogs and show dogs. Thus, my research brought me into contact with a number of breeders and owners who were also avid exhibitors on the British dog show circuit. Having produced a successful undergraduate thesis which considered how the historical narratives attached to different bloodlines shaped relationships between humans – as well as between humans and dogs – in the sled-dog community, I shifted my attention to a larger study of dog showing, which first became the focus of my MSc thesis

and later the basis of my doctoral studies. In short, I headed into my doctoral fieldwork with several years' experience of working with both pedigree dogs and their breeders.

My research in the show-world took me the length and breadth of the British mainland. Like the breeders I worked with, I spent many hours traveling the long distances from my home in Edinburgh to Championship Shows held at large exhibition centres and agricultural showgrounds as far south as Bournemouth and Exeter. There are roughly forty Group and General Championship Shows held annually,<sup>36</sup> so these large events took up many of my weekends. At other times, I spent Saturdays and Sundays visiting some of the many smaller Open shows which regularly take place around the country at local community centres or sports venues. Open shows are much cheaper to participate in than Championship Shows, and somewhat less formal. Some exhibitors take Open shows as an opportunity to 'practice' for high-cost, high-stakes Championship events, but most seem to treat Open shows as a good opportunity to meet with other breeders and exhibit their dogs in a relatively inexpensive and relatively stress-free setting. Exhibitors and judges are usually more relaxed at Open shows, and, although these events provide fewer opportunities to rub shoulders with the high-flyers of the show-world, they provide invaluable opportunities to strike up relationships with breeders. The same is true of the many more or less casual meetings at church halls or leisure centres, where exhibitors and their dogs gather to attend show-ring training classes and where, on one or two evenings a week, I would participate in proceedings. These classes are usually organised by local dog showing societies and run by senior members of the community who volunteer to act as coaches and judges, putting dogs and owners through their paces and providing tips for improving technique. As with dog shows, these events were an opportunity for me to meet and socialise with a large number of

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<sup>36</sup> Group shows are open to members of breeds belonging to one or more of the seven groups: Working, Pastoral, Gundog, Hound, Utility, Terrier, and Toy. General Championship Shows are open to all breeds. Group shows are often one or two day events, while General Championship Shows usually take place over three or four days.



owners, breeders, judges – and, indeed, dogs – from different breeds, and to observe show-world life in its various public forms.



Figure 7: Sussex Spaniels being exhibited at an outdoor dog show.<sup>37</sup>

What soon became apparent, however, was that there were those who met my presence in the show-world with suspicion and concern. When meeting a breeder or judge for the first time, I was often told about the upset caused by the *Pedigree Dogs Exposed* documentary and – sometime jokingly, sometimes not – asked whether I intended to cause similar problems for breeders as they claimed to have experienced at the hands of the show’s now-infamous producer, Jemima Harrison. Yet despite the negative publicity that had resulted from their cooperation with researchers from *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*, the Kennel Club responded positively to news of my research, and invited me to spend a few days speaking to various members of staff at their London headquarters. Smaller,

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<sup>37</sup> By Dan Bennett (Flickr: sussex spaniels) [CC BY 2.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ASussex\\_spaniels\\_at\\_dog\\_show.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ASussex_spaniels_at_dog_show.jpg) [retrieved 20/07/2016].

breed-specific clubs, however, were much more wary, several refusing my requests to attend shows or talk to committee members, others allowing me to do so only on strict terms and under supervision. When it came to individual breeders, some were quick to welcome me into the show-world, but others remained concerned and on their guard, evading certain topics of conversation and dismissing my requests to visit their homes. A significant number were evidently uncomfortable talking to me at public events such as dog shows, no doubt concerned that our association would make them the subject of the rampant gossip that perpetually circulated in the community.

Breeders' anxieties often meant that, while dog shows were useful events at which to watch and learn about public interactions between exhibitors, judges, and dogs, in-depth conversations about the dogs and dog showing were largely limited to the privacy of breeders' homes, or to conversations over the telephone. As previous encounters with breeders had taught me to expect, telephone conversations were a significant part of show-world sociality. Most breeders I worked with spent several hours each day speaking to their peers on the telephone, and most seemed just as happy to speak to me as to other members of their community. Conversations were largely one-sided, as breeders talked at length about their own show-world careers, dogs past and present, breed histories, goings on at the Kennel Club, indiscretions by members of breed club committees, anecdotes about who in their breeds had fallen out or made up with whom, updates about whose dogs had passed or failed their health tests, allegations that someone or other had bred too many litters, and musings on who was or was not considered to be a good breeder or puppy-farmer. These conversations were often continued on Facebook, where much the same dynamic prevailed. As in my off-line interactions, I quickly discovered that my own involvement tended towards the observation of public goings on, while deeper engagement was the preserve of conversations via private messaging.

This thesis reflects these show-world patterns of social interaction: true to the daily lives of the breeders I worked with, many of the chapters focus largely on

conversations *about* happenings in the show-world and the way in which events are discussed; in the privacy of the kennel, the public arenas of the show-ring, or in the pages of the influential show-world newspapers, which I, like many of my informants, was in the habit of reading from cover to cover each week. Implicit in this form of interaction is that – as in daily show-world life – the dogs themselves are more often than not at a remove from social interaction. So, while most interactions in the show-world are about dogs, most don't involve the animals directly. Rather, dogs sit in kennels or on kitchen floors while owners talk on the telephone or interact via Facebook. At dog shows, dogs sit for hours in vans, in cages, on benches, or – if they are docile enough – at the feet of their owners, who catch up on show-world gossip, swap advice, or discuss events from dog shows past.

My own place in these conversations changed somewhat when, in March 2012, after five months of fieldwork, my partner and I decided to get a dog of our own. The decision was one we had been mulling over for a while, yet ultimately it was my fieldwork that spurred us into action. Our initial plans to take on a rescue dog notwithstanding, the decision to get a pedigree dog was effectively made for us by the demands of my field site. In the show-world, the conceptual distinction between Kennel Club registered dogs of purebred heritage and unregistered or crossbred animals is profound, and taking on one or the other is a highly politicised statement of allegiance to – and at once a direct rejection of – a set of core values and beliefs. Mindful of the inevitable consequences, we chose to find a pedigree dog from the show-world who was looking for a new home. I was aware that many breeders would 'run on' puppies in the hope that they would prove promising candidates for show-ring success, later selling off those who were not up to standard to pet homes or exhibitors less concerned about winning high-level competitions. It was by this circuitous route that we found Ali, a Smooth Collie who features in Chapter Four of this thesis and was my companion during the majority of my research.

With Ali by my side, I was suddenly made welcome in the show-world in many new and subtle ways. People who had previously responded to me with marked suspicion were suddenly keen to talk, now that I had a pedigree dog of my own and was entering the show-ring. Unwittingly, we had chosen a dog which belonged to a breed low in numbers, so low in fact that I was often the only Smooth Collie owner in attendance at a show or training class. This made Ali something of a novelty and meant that we weren't often competing in a highly contested category – not that either Ali or myself were a threat to any experienced exhibitors. Since I did not have a dog pitted against any established hierarchies, Ali not only legitimised my own presence but also allowed me to become much more involved in show-world practice. What is more, while I had previously handled other peoples' dogs at shows and in training classes, participating in these events with my own dog brought a new understanding of the highs and lows of exhibition. Recently, Tim Ingold reminded us that by way of participant observation, anthropological fieldwork has 'the means and the determination to show how knowledge grows from the crucible of lives lived with others' (Ingold, 2014:388). While I remain somewhat sceptical of the notion that dogs or other animals can figure as 'research assistants' per se, Ali's presence certainly reminded me of the fact that our companions – human or otherwise – shape the way we experience, know, and see the world. Soon, it turned out neither Ali nor myself fared particularly well in the show-ring, but my newfound status as part of a team of two provided a new form of engagement, new perspectives, and so too new enthusiasm for the task of participant observation in dog showing communities.

My concern, however, was not merely to learn about dog showing but about concepts of canine health and practices of care. So, when I wasn't visiting breeders and dogs in their homes, I spent most week-days at one of a handful of veterinary practices: a couple near my home in Scotland and others in the north of England and the Midlands in close proximity to the houses of friends and family members with whom I often stayed during my research. Gaining access to veterinary practice was always going to be a more formal process than walking

into a dog show, but once through the door, research often proved to be easier. Most of the vets I worked with assumed that I, like them, took a critical view of pedigree dog breeders, which made them quick and keen to share with me their opinions, at least in the relative privacy of practice staff-rooms or in between consultations. The exception to this experience was a vet to whom I have referred in this thesis as Melanie, a specialist in assisted reproduction. Early on in my fieldwork, I had the good fortune to learn that Melanie worked out of a clinic only a few miles from my home. Here, she provided services to dogs from all corners of the show-world whose breeders had brought them in for everything from artificial insemination to semen collection and storage. Working at Melanie's clinic provided two key advantages: firstly, the clinic attracted breeders from all over the country, who would often spend several hours waiting while procedures were performed on their dogs. Secondly, and just as importantly, my association with the clinic legitimised my interest in pedigree dog health. Breeders who had been quick to dismiss my questions when we had met at dog shows now notably changed their attitudes and became at once far more willing to talk to me and to discuss subjects which – outside the clinic – were largely considered taboo. Although Melanie and events in her clinic are not discussed at length in this thesis, many of the encounters with breeders I do relate are the results of my time spent there, and my knowledge of dog breeding at large was greatly increased thanks to Melanie's kindness.

### Field Site

My research was conducted in a Britain that was still sorely aware of the effects of the 2007 economic crisis. Politically, the country had taken a shift to the right: a Conservative-led coalition government had been elected to power, and the main talking points in the populist press were the perceived abuse of state benefits and the alleged turmoil on account of immigration – particularly from eastern member states of the European Union. Within the British dog showing community, public discourse generally gave the impression of a community which shared the concerns of Daily Mail-reading middle-England. Indeed, the

tone of most articles and features in the two weekly show-world newspapers, written largely by respected, senior members of the community, was in keeping with Britain's right-wing media, although most show-world commentators focused on the 'floods' of Eastern European puppies, rather than the perceived threat of migrant workers.

Intriguing though it may be, however, the relationship between pedigree dog breeding and nationalism is not the focus of my work. Neither are the related issues of British kinship and class politics, both of which permeate almost all aspects of life in the show-world. While any and all of the above could have made for interesting research projects, studies in kinship, class, and nation in British animal breeding communities have been undertaken relatively recently and to great success (see Cassidy 2002, 2007; Hurn, 2008a, 2008b). Unsurprisingly, then, all three of these issues are rarely far from people's minds in conversations about pedigree dog breeding – including this thesis – and all three shape the ways in which dog breeders categorise and care for good and bad, healthy and diseased dogs. So, while I have chosen to focus predominantly on conflicts and negotiations surrounding health and care, there is nonetheless a place for kinship, class, and nation in many of the debates that feature in the following pages.

### Ethics

My primary ethical concern, both in conducting my research and in writing my thesis, has been to respect my informants' rights to anonymity and privacy. Much like most anthropologists, I occasionally had problems gaining what I considered to be full informed consent. This was mainly due to difficulties in communicating the nature of anthropology and my research, and where I could not overcome them, I have chosen to omit information gathered in these instances. To the best of my knowledge, the informants whose words and stories are included in this thesis were all aware of my intentions and of their role in my research.

During my fieldwork, I took great care not to disclose the names of vets or breeders I was working with to any of their colleagues or peers, unless express

permission had been granted. Likewise, I took care not to disclose any information – sensitive or otherwise – about informants or their dogs which I had gathered in the course of my research. In writing up the findings of my research, I have erred on the side of caution. Anyone who has any experience of the show-world will know that gossip is rampant. I have therefore made every effort to ensure informants and their dogs cannot be identified. Firstly, I have refrained from using my own photographs of specific dogs I encountered in the course of my research. I have no doubt that breeders would be able to identify these animals, so, with the exception of photos of my own dog, Ali, I have only used pictures sourced from online archives and licenced for common use. In my writing, I have used pseudonyms for the vast majority of humans and dogs mentioned. The exceptions to this are instances where I include direct quotes, be they from speakers at dog breeding seminars and other public events, from interviews with Kennel Club officials,<sup>38</sup> or from individuals quoted in the media and the show-world press.

In the case of the show-world, however, I am not confident that the precaution of using pseudonyms guarantees anonymity. The show-world is small, and specific breed communities are even smaller. Keen individuals would no doubt be able to identify their peers due to their links to specific breeds, health conditions, and practices mentioned in the telling of their stories. So, while the quotes included are direct and unaltered, I have changed the names of breeds as well as breeders' genders, localities, marital statuses, and the numbers of their dogs. In some cases, doing so while staying true to their own experiences has proven tricky, particularly in the case of the Otterhound. This breed features heavily in Chapter Six, where I have decided that the only way to tell the story of the breed as I came to know it was to create a composite character, a breeder I have named Jim. The Otterhound is especially low in numbers, breeders are well-connected, and the specifics of the breed are key to the current problems breeders and dogs face. Creating Jim, however, has enabled me to tell some parts of their story, without

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<sup>38</sup> In one case, I have decided to anonymise a Kennel Club official due to the sensitive nature of their statements, although these were not expressly made 'off the record'.

pointing fingers at specific individuals, many of whom were very helpful in teaching me about their dogs and breed. Jim is an amalgam of Otterhound breeders and my experiences of individuals working in related breeds, so his views and concerns are representative of many I met in the Otterhound community and beyond.

Speaking more generally, I must also clarify that the examples in this thesis are not chosen to excite or shock readers. On the contrary, I have omitted many more 'scandalous' examples of both show-world and veterinary practice which, I feel, would serve little purpose, other than to distract from the theoretical arguments I put forward. My objective is not to suggest that Pugs, Boxers, Chinese Crested Dogs, Smooth Collies, or any of the other breeds that feature here are the source or subject of more concern than others. As noted above, in many cases I have changed or indeed invented the names of those in discussion so as to safeguard their anonymity. The examples I include have been chosen because they shed light on the circumstances of many across the show-world as well as on the common concerns and debates that typify show-breeding practice. Whether anyone from the show-world will read my thesis I am unsure, but were it to be widely read, I have no doubt that someone in the show-world would have an issue with most things I write, and the same reaction would probably be forthcoming from certain vets. I can tell them with certainty and confidence, however, that I have remained true to the essence – if not the precise detail – of all my encounters and experiences with both practices.

### Terminology

Before moving onto chapter summaries, a quick note on terminology. I will follow the lead of my informants in referring to the community of breeders and dogs who meet in the show-rings of Great Britain as constituting 'the show-world'. For the same reason, I will refer to the breeders of pedigree show dogs simply as 'breeders' or 'show-breeders'. At times, I will also refer to members of the show-world as exhibitors or judges. While the majority of people I worked with in this



community actively exhibit, breed, and judge pedigree show dogs, a good number merely buy and exhibit dogs bred by other breeders. In order to include the latter category, I have used the term 'exhibitors' in discussions which focus on the exhibition of dogs in the show-ring. Likewise, I have used the term 'judges' to refer to breeders and exhibitors who are, at the moment in question, acting in that role. Like the breeders I worked with, I use the term 'kennel' to refer to the homes they share with their dogs, whether their dogs live outdoors in separate buildings or, as is often the case, in the main house.

When I speak of dogs, the term 'pedigree' implies registration with the British Kennel Club, as does the term 'purebred' which, in the show-world, refers to dogs of known and certified ancestry. Dogs who appear to belong to a breed based on their appearance but are not recognised by the Kennel Club are referred to as 'unregistered'. While the term 'pet' has recently been problematized in scholarly discussion (see Linzey & Cohn, 2011), it is widely used by both members of the show-world and the general public. Indeed, the fact that this term speaks of hierarchy, ownership, and a lack of agency on the part of non-human beings is entirely relevant here, and to use a different word to refer to the vast majority of the dogs I worked with would be to deny these crucial and defining aspects of their relationship with their human 'owners'; another term now rejected by some academics but used widely in the show-world and in British society at large, where it remains an eloquent comment on the quality of human-animal relations. And while critics might argue that anthropology as a discipline is already beset by generalisations and representations of 'types', it will become clear in the course of this thesis that so too is the show-world. Conversations, newspaper articles, and books on breeding are littered with references to various types of good, careful, and ethical breeders, alongside just as many references to good, well-bred dogs, and the same is true of their opposites: bad, unethical breeders and bad, poorly-bred dogs. Yet rather than simply reproduce this sort of categorical thinking, this study will examine how these categories emerge and how they shape the lives of both dogs and breeders.

To remove another potential source of confusion, let me add that, when I discuss whether or not a given show-breeder or vet approaches a dog as a subject, I use the term 'subject' to mean an individual with conscious experiences – desires, beliefs, feelings. Likewise, I use the term 'subjectivity' to signify the collective perceptions, understandings, and feelings which form the interiority of the dog as an individual, experiential being. And finally, throughout this thesis I use the term 'traditional' to refer to the long-established knowledge and practices of the show-world. Again, I take my lead from the breeders I worked with who habitually used the same term. However, the fact that the term suggests a static, unchanging, idealised past is not overlooked and should be taken as indicative of the perceived morality of both the practices which fall within and outwith this category.

## Chapter Summaries

Chapter One of this thesis examines what breeders of pedigree show dogs mean when they talk about a 'good' dog. I argue that the goodness of a dog is not determined by any invariant moral status attributed to dogs as living beings, but rather in relation to two specific criteria: firstly, the dog's links to other dogs in the breed; secondly, the dog's physical proximity to the idealised image described in its Breed Standard. Drawing on recent discussions in the anthropology of ethics, this chapter argues that show-world criteria address the virtuosity of practices by which canine genealogies and canine bodies are created. Close attention is paid to the particular temporality which underlies selective breeding as, taking my lead from Cassidy (2002, 2009), I examine how history and temporality are put to work as a means of distinguishing certain types of humans and certain types of dogs. I argue that both the history of dog breeding and the bodies of dogs in the show-world today are shaped by what Bamford and Leach (2009) refer to as 'genealogical thinking': an ethic which prioritises selection and improvement. Tracing the traditional show-world practices by which goodness is cultivated, I examine the ways in which nature is implicated in the production of canine bodies, and, in relation, how responsibility for the creation of certain

features is attributed. Throughout, I argue that the qualities of aesthetic virtue and moral virtue are inextricably linked, not only in the bodies of dogs, but also in the care practices by which breeders aim to produce and sustain canine bodies in their idealised forms.

Staying with the themes of common language and ethics, Chapter Two focuses on the show-world criteria used to identify who counts as a good breeder. It looks at the practices through which breeders develop an expertise in a given breed, and which shape not only their perceptions of dogs but also their relationships with them. Contrary to the general assumption that a person's duty of care arises from and in turn creates intimacy, I argue that good care in the show-world often requires a particular distance – both affective and physical – between breeders and dogs. It is this distance, I suggest, which enables breeders to cultivate the skilled vision they need to assess the virtue of a dog's body in relation to the images described in its Breed Standard. The quintessence of this chapter is that, through engagement in skilled, visual practice, breeders learn to perceive and respond to pedigree-dogs in particular ways. These skilled practices assert both the virtuosity of dogs and breeders and count, in the show world, as vital practices of care for both dogs and breeds. Also of importance here is that, while onlookers might criticise breeders for responding to the needs of their breeds at the expense of their dogs, those in the show-world see little to no tension between how they must care for pedigree dogs and breeds in general. After all, in its most virtuous forms, care for dogs and breeds is understood to be one and the same.

In Chapter Three, I examine the virtue of traditional show-world breeding practices, including inbreeding and culling. Here, I further develop the argument that breeders' view their own abilities – and responsibilities – as limited by nature's ability to control and shape the bodies of dogs, a perspective which is key to the understanding how certain practices come to count as good care. Although many critics of the show-world claim that low levels of genetic diversity and high levels of inbreeding increase the risk of suffering and disease, many breeders see things differently. In their view, inbreeding remains the surest way

to *minimise* risk, safeguarding the well-being of pedigree dogs and their breeds by keeping to a minimum the physical and genetic divergence from show-world ideals. Yet in the context of the show-world, inbreeding is not a stand-alone practice. Until recently, it has been carried out alongside a range of supportive practices, some of which – including the culling of unhealthy stock – no longer meet with approval from the Kennel Club or indeed the general public. In the view of many show-breeders, however, culling and similarly controversial traditional breeding practices were integral to a set of highly attuned, virtuous forms of care for both pedigree dogs and their breeds. Here, I examine how a breeder's ability to breed dogs and respond to their needs not only emerges from but also relies on particular care practices. In response to recent work on animal breeding, I argue that a breeder's ability to remain a stable relational distance from dogs is integral to the virtuosity of care, even at times when care practices appear harmful to particular dogs. Fundamental to this notion of care, I conclude, is that even when certain practices might appear to prioritise the wellbeing of the collective over that of the individual, good care in the show-world is understood to attend to the best interests of the animal as it is known in the show world – that is, as a member of its breed.

Chapter Four looks at the modification practices breeders use to bring the bodies of their dogs in line with the breed ideal. It considers how practices including chemical hair-removal, the training of ear-cartilage, and the cutting, spraying, and painting of dogs' coats are incorporated into routines of good show-world care by means of which breeders and exhibitors fulfil their duties to uphold the 'natural' images of their breeds. In the show-world, failure to engage in approved material practices and modify faults is, I argue, understood as a neglect of duty and evidence that breeders lack the virtuosity required to care well for dogs and their breeds. This chapter, then, is about breeders' abilities to care for the image of their breeds in material ways. These abilities, I argue, not only rely on the skilled cultivation of canine bodies, but also on breeders' skilled balancing of the affective distances at which they hold both dogs and breeds. Here, too, I suggest that the dual ability to relate and respond to a pedigree dog as a member of its

breed, and to breeds as incorporating collectives of living dogs, is crucial to both the virtue and virtuosity of show-world practices of care.

Chapter Five focuses on the ongoing tensions between the practices of pedigree dog breeding and veterinary medicine. This chapter charts the introduction of vets and veterinary standards of health into the show-ring, where they come into conflict with exhibitors, dog show judges, and Breed-Standards. I argue that conflicts arise not only from the divergent use of shared language, especially subjective and emotive terms such as 'health'. These conflicts also arise from divergent readings of canine bodies, which 'speak' to vets and breeders in very different ways, so much so that Breed-Specific features can be considered 'perfect' in the show-ring and 'pathological' in the veterinary office. Contributing to the conversation around ethics and 'ordinary language', I argue that obligations and responsibilities of care are contingent on practice-specific concepts of what counts as a healthy dog. After all, when concepts of health and responsibility are different, ethical conflicts emerge.

In Chapter Six, I examine how show-breeders respond to ever-increasing pressure to engage with veterinary notions of health by yielding to the contentious practice of health testing. I argue that health testing not only presents breeders with new moral imperatives to respond to disease in certain ways; health testing also compels breeders to fundamentally rethink and reframe many aspects of pedigree dogs which – in the contexts of their breeds – are believed to be signs of good health. In situations where health testing practices threaten the integrity of their breeds, I argue that both ignorance of veterinary knowledge and silence in the face of disease are deemed good, ethical forms of care among show-breeders. Moreover, I argue that the virtue of breeders' deliberate cultivation of ignorance is supported by an understanding of nature as a force that at times limits their ability to prevent inheritable disease. Furthering my argument that nature, rather than the breeder, is seen as the responsible agent in incidents of disease, I suggest that this view enables breeders to take credit for success while at once enabling them to defer responsibility for problems that arise in the course

of selective breeding. Summarily, then, I argue that the show-world concept of nature is key to breeders' notions of what counts as good practice and good care for pedigree dogs and their breeds.

As previous chapters have collectively argued, when breeders and vets bring different concepts of health to caring encounters, conflict often ensues. Yet, the fact is that breeders and vets are, in many ways, mutually dependant on one another in caring for animals and sustaining livelihoods. So it is that breeders and vets must find ways to work together in the course of daily practice. In Chapter Seven - the final chapter in this thesis - I examine how breeders and vets respond to the multiple and conflicting demands of caring for pedigree dogs in the course of encounters often fraught with unresolved tension. In doing so, I show how attempts to sustain the health of pedigree dogs - and, in breeders' case, their breeds - are characterised by continual negotiation and compromise. Asking how seemingly irreconcilable notions of what counts as good health play out in these negotiations, I argue that care, in these cases, relies on the ability to transcend - or at least overlook - difference. In practice, I argue that these negotiations are often non-verbal, and based on a mutual understanding that the ability to work together in performing care relies as much on silence as it does on discussion. Returning to the question of responsibility, this chapter further supports my argument that breeders and vets both view their own abilities to respond to disease as limited by their restricted agency, a perspective which, I argue, shapes the ways that care is perceived and enacted in both the kennel and the clinic.



## Chapter One - Setting the Standard: What is a Good Dog?

It is Saturday morning in spring 2012 and I am sitting on a hard plastic chair in the middle of a sports hall, trying to take in the scene. Despite the cold outside, by 9 am the hall is warm and stuffy, the air thick with the heady smell of talcum powder and dog urine. Two sets of double-doors stand wide open at one end of the building, where smokers cluster in the meagre shelter of each exit and out on the dew-covered sports field dogs in full-body waterproof overalls strain on their leads and sniff at the grass. Inside, the hall is lined by even more dogs, though these are kept in cages while their exhibitors catch up on gossip and prepare for their appearance in the show-ring. At the rear end, dogs with long, flowing fur sit patiently on grooming tables while their coats are combed, plucked, fluffed, and straightened. Among them are an Afghan Hound and two Old English Sheepdogs with their carefully brushed hair tied up in bunches. Nearby, two elderly ladies attend to their West Highland White Terriers, brazenly flouting Kennel Club rules as they dust their dogs with liberal coatings of talcum powder. Never mind that the use of coat-whitening products has been outlawed. On the other side of one of the hall's eight show-rings, marked out by chairs and plastic tape, a poodle exhibitor appears to be similarly unconcerned by a recent Kennel Club mandate. The gentleman is liberally applying a final layer of hairspray to his dog's coat.

By 9:30 am, judging is underway and each of the show-rings has been occupied by groups of dogs and exhibitors lined up in front of a judge. I sit watching a group of Flat Coated Retrievers, trying hopelessly to guess which of the nine seemingly identical dogs will be picked out for first prize. The hall is busy now, the edges of each show-ring thronged with people who stand and chat while their dogs sit at their feet or lie flat-out on the floor, apparently unperturbed by the noise and bustle of the event. Across the hall, I spot a Pug breeder, Mabel – a woman in her seventies whom I often talk to at shows. I make my way through the crowds to the open exit doors, where I head Mabel off on her way out of the building. 'I've left my show-lead in the car,' she explains as we step out into the fresh air. As we walk across the muddy field that is functioning as an overflow car park, Mabel



fills me in on the latest show-world goings-on. The previous week, one of her friend's bitches had needed an emergency Caesarean section after struggling to deliver a litter of puppies, Mabel tells me, followed by the news that:

'The latest Breed Record Supplement is out, and it's as depressing as ever. 90% of the breeders who've bred litters in the last 3 months are puppy farmers. None of them are names I recognise from the show-world. They certainly don't show their dogs. And half of the puppies listed were bred in Eastern Europe ... our breed is in a terrible mess.'

She pauses as we reach her car, then leans in to the back seat to pull out a red leather show lead. 'I'm showing one of the black [Pugs] today,' she explains. 'I pick colours that complement their coats, hence the outfit,' she smiles, pointing at her own red polyester suit-trousers and cream blouse. Mabel locks the car and we are about to turn back towards the sports hall when a middle-aged couple stop next to us. They, too, have brought a Pug. 'We saw your number plate and the stickers,' the man tells us, gesturing to the PUG 66 registration on the back of Mabel's car. 'We heard there was a dog show here today, so we've come to find out about showing her.' With a proud expression he points at his dog. Mabel steps back and crouches down, looking at the animal with narrowed eyes. 'Hmm. She's a nice little thing. I'll tell you what, she's got something you don't see every day.' Mabel runs her fingers along the length of the dog's spine. 'You see that darker line?' she asks, pointing to the greyish streak on the animal's otherwise fawn-coloured coat. 'That's called a 'trace'. It's something all Pugs should have, but there are a lot of bloodlines that don't have them these days. Come inside and I'll show you what I mean,' she invites the couple, gesturing towards the building and the ongoing dog show.

We cross the car park, Mabel striding ahead while the couple gently encourage the little Pug, who is notably more unsettled by the sights and sounds than the crowds of experienced show dogs that are being led from cars and vans towards the venue. As we near the entrance, Mabel turns to face the couple. 'Who bred her?' The woman looks startled. 'We got her from a lady up in Scotland, in

Dumfries and Galloway.’ Mabel takes a guess: ‘Shona Pike?’ This time the man answers. ‘No, her name was Alison. Can’t remember her last name. Can you, love?’ His wife glances at the dog. ‘No. She breeds pugs and some other breeds. Japanese something-or-others, I think. And those little Spaniels. Cavaliers, that’s it.’ I look up at Mabel, whose face has fallen. ‘Sounds like a puppy farmer,’ she curtly informs the couple, before a look of realisation passes over her face. ‘She is Kennel Club registered, isn’t she?’ As if to clarify that she is not talking about the breeder, Mabel points down at the Pug. The woman shares a hesitant look with her husband, before telling Mabel:

‘Well. Not yet. I mean, the breeder said there was no need if we weren’t going to show her, and we didn’t think we were. It would just be more expensive, she told us, so we didn’t bother. But she is a pedigree. Her dad is Kennel Club. That was part of what we wanted to ask: we wanted to find out how we get her registered.’

I can tell Mabel’s attitude has changed. She is standing tall, hands on her hips. ‘She’s conned you,’ she tells the couple with an air of finality:

‘If she didn’t register the litter with the Kennel Club, it’s because she’s a puppy farmer and the dog didn’t come from registered parents. Even if the sire is registered, it doesn’t mean the puppies are purebred. The mother could have come from anywhere. You don’t know what’s behind her. You certainly can’t show her.’

Suddenly suspicious of both the dog and her owners, Mabel begins a new line of questioning. ‘Why did you want to show her, anyway? You’re not thinking about breeding from her, are you?’ There is a pause, then the man clears his throat. ‘We ... we thought if we could sort out her Kennel Club papers, then we could maybe find someone who has a nice dog...’ Mabel interrupts:

‘No breeder worth their salt will let one of their dogs anywhere near an unregistered bitch. What you need to do is get that bitch neutered. And before you even think about breeding, you need to know a lot

more about the breed. And you need to find a proper breeder who will sell you a decent, registered dog.'

Catching my frown, Mabel suddenly softens. 'I'm sorry,' she apologises to the couple, who are both visibly shaken by the news. 'I don't mean to be unkind. We just... we see this a lot in this breed, people being taken advantage of by puppy farmers. She looks like a lovely pet.' As one, we look down at the Pug who stands shivering in the cold. 'If you want to come inside, I can introduce you to some other breeders who can help you find a better one next time.' The woman glances from the Pug to her husband. 'I... I think we'd perhaps better go home. I... I'm sorry. We really just wanted to find out if we could enter her in a show, but it doesn't matter.' Before Mabel can attempt to persuade them otherwise, the couple say their hurried goodbyes and leave. Surprised at Mabel's insensitivity and unsure of what to say, I keep quiet as she tries to convince me of her good intentions, her struggle to do the right thing for the breed despite her own feelings of helplessness and desperation over its rapid decline in standards. 'She could have been a good little dog, that one,' she concludes with a sigh. 'If only she wasn't obviously so badly-bred.'

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From the earliest days of the dog fancy, distinctions have been made between dogs considered to be 'well-bred', 'true to type' and thus fundamentally 'good', and dogs who have neither of these desirable qualities (See Ritvo 1987; Turner 2010). As Mabel's evaluation of the unregistered Pug demonstrates, after 150 years of dog shows, these distinctions continue to underpin the ethics of show-world practice. In the course of my fieldwork, I hear countless breeders use the term 'good' to describe dogs they approve of, admire, and covet. In this first chapter, I will examine what breeders of pedigree show dogs mean when they talk about a 'good' dog, and how these breeders attribute material and moral significance to pedigree dogs as members of their breeds. In doing so, I will

explore the criteria by which dogs are classified and categorised, and consider how these categorisations shape relations of care.

Importantly, I argue that the criteria which have traditionally been used in the show-world to evaluate what counts as a 'good' – and, by implication, 'fit' and 'healthy' – pedigree dog are specific to show-world practice. This is central to my overall argument in this thesis, based as it is on the observation that the show-world concept of a good, healthy dog differs substantially from the concept of health which informs the practice of veterinary medicine. In revealing how dogs are conceptualised and evaluated in the show-world, this chapter lays the ground for my subsequent discussion of the fundamental tensions and conflicts between show-world and veterinary practice, tensions and conflicts that arise from a shared use of the terms 'good' and 'healthy' in reference to pedigree dogs.

In the show-world, the individual character of the animal-as-sentient-subject is not the main let alone the only point of concern. Certainly, good dogs are by-and-large those which don't have temperament issues: an aggressive dog is a liability in the show-ring, hence not much use to a breeder or exhibitor, but aside from the requirement that a dog is amicable and tolerant of show-ring practice, its character is not generally seen to be of great importance when it comes to show-world evaluations. Rather, dogs are made and known in the show-world as good, well-bred, healthy pedigree dogs through their connections to particular images, documents, ancestors, breeders, and histories idealised in their breeds. My discussions here are influenced by Donna Haraway's notion of 'mattering' as the processes in which things are made real – that is, materially and morally significant – through their connections with other things (2008:70). In his work on ethics in animal welfare charities in Scotland, Adam Reed likewise draws on Haraway's work to argue that the definition or redefinition of nature and any connections to it 'continues to allow subjects to differentiate their position, animate claims, to good or bad behaviour, and "reconfigure the kinds of persons we might be' (Reed, 2015:3, c.f. Haraway, 1991:3). Similar to the charity workers and activists Reed works with, I argue that show-breeders take their cues from a

particular understanding of nature and what is natural, and that these concepts inform show-world practice in both a practical and a moral sense. Like those presented by Reed, the examples I give in this chapter are an attempt to 'draw out the ways in which ethics and nature and the opposition between the natural and the unnatural play out' (2015:9). What is more, I argue that notions of what is natural shape and limit show-world practices of care. Much like Rebecca Cassidy, I link my discussion of nature to the 'genealogical thinking' (Bamford and Leach, 2009) which pervades the show-world and its rationale that the pedigrees and Breed Standards through which kinship and virtue are visualised not only place limits on what may be considered good care, but also, as Mary Bouquet (1996) argues, limit the very concept of goodness. Here, I heed the recent call of Giraud and Hollin that 'further attention should be paid to the histories, contexts, and exclusions that lie behind caring encounters' (2016:44). My argument here is clear: in the show-world, good care attends to pedigree dogs *as members of their breeds*, a fact which often means that show-world ethics of care contradict the ethics of care in practices which focus on the wellbeing of dogs as individuals, most notably the practice of veterinary medicine.

### The Importance of the Pedigree

Back in the sports hall where the dog show is in full swing, Mabel's friends are supportive of her attempts to dissuade the couple from breeding their unregistered Pug. 'You did the right thing,' a fellow exhibitor assures her. 'Far too many unregistered dogs out there as it is. Last thing we need are more badly-bred, unregistered Pugs.' The dog's breeder is obviously an irresponsible puppy-farmer who is not looking after the interests of the breed, the friends conclude. Mabel does not mention the fact that she had initially assessed the Pug to be a 'nice' example of the breed. When I quiz her after the show, she seems somewhat embarrassed. In her own defence, she insists that the Pug is an anomaly, and that its appearance is not down to any skill on the part of the breeder. As she explains;

‘Sometimes good genes come through in bad breeding. It doesn’t happen often, but sometimes it can. Just like us good breeders can sometimes end up with some pups in a litter that just don’t look like we’d hope – it’s how nature works.’

Like many of the other show-breeders who feature in this thesis, Mabel is a firm believer that ‘nature’ has much to do with the bodies of pedigree dogs, and that the responsibility for the occasional appearance of non-Standard fitting dogs is simply outwith the control of even the best breeders. Nonetheless, she shares the dominant show-world view that good, responsible breeders try their very best to ensure that variation and anomaly do not appear. According to her, the difference between show-breeders and the ‘puppy-farmer’ who bred the unregistered Pug is that, in the kennels of show-breeders, Standard-fitting puppies are not the exception. As she insists:

‘Most of our puppies will fit the Breed Standard because we know what we’re doing and we *want* to better the breed. The person who bred that [unregistered] Pug doesn’t give a damn about the breed – she’s just out to make money.’

How does Mabel know this for certain? With an incredulous look, she tells me, ‘Because otherwise [the breeder] would have made sure the dog was Kennel Club-registered.’ Like virtually all of her show-world peers, Mabel sees Kennel Club registration as a fundamental part of a dog’s identity. Yet registration is not an option for everyone who decides to breed from their dogs. The Kennel Club system is primarily concerned with the regulation of closed gene-pools and, in order for a litter of puppies to be eligible for registration, both parents must be registered members of the same breed, meaning they are also the offspring of registered animals, as are their parents, and their parents, and so on. On the assumption that all breeders are honest in reporting the true parentage of their litters, Kennel Club registration is taken in the show-world as an assurance of a particular kind of purity, one based on the notion that an animal is purebred if all its ancestors are known to belong to the same breed. Kennel Club registration thus speaks to widespread concerns of the sort demonstrated by Mabel in her

encounter with the owners of the unregistered Pug. As she and other breeders often point out, a dog might look like it belongs to a certain breed, but, without detailed knowledge of its ancestry, one must assume that the animal is not purebred. The consequence of this thinking is that unregistered dogs simply don't count in the show-world. As far as many breeders are concerned, even unregistered dogs that look like members of a registered breed belong in the category of 'other' dogs, along with rescue dogs, crossbreed, and mongrels.

In short, a pedigree is an important signifier that a dog might be the product of careful, responsible breeding. Yet not all Kennel Club registered dogs are seen as 'good' dogs in the show-world. As Rebecca Cassidy points out, pedigrees lead people to think about their knowledge of domestic animals in a particular way (Cassidy 2009:24), and to know a dog in the show-world requires knowledge of its canine ancestry as well as knowledge of the breeders whose names appear in the dog's pedigree. This document is seen as written proof that the Breed-Standard fitting body of a dog is not merely the result of chance and luck at the hands of unskilled breeders. On the contrary, a pedigree full of prestigious names is a sign that a good dog is the product of generations of careful cultivation.

Kennel Club registration, then, is not only a means for breeders to 'prove' the purity of a litter. It also provides them with the opportunity to formally associate themselves and their dogs with those who have come before. When a puppy is registered, it is formally ascribed a 'kennel name', which usually consists of the breeder's registered kennel prefix<sup>39</sup> followed by a word or two so as to identify the individual puppy. A puppy from the 'Kenine' kennel, for instance, might be named 'Kenine's Red Rose', or 'Kenine's Morning Haze'. In other words, a dog's kennel name not only identifies the individual dog, but also creates inalienable ties to other dogs in the kennel and, indeed, to the human who bred it. What is more, when a puppy is sold or passed on to a new owner, its registration is

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<sup>39</sup> It's not compulsory to have a prefix, but almost all show-breeders have one. Puppies registered without a prefix are viewed with some suspicion and generally associated with commercial breeders and puppy farmers.

transferred by the Kennel Club, at which point the new owner can add her kennel name as a suffix, for instance, 'Kenine's Red Rose at Kenmillex', creating a lasting association between two breeders – in this example, the owners of the Kenine and Kenmillex kennels<sup>40</sup>. Thus, a dog's name can indicate a relationship of mutual respect and trust between several breeders.<sup>41</sup>

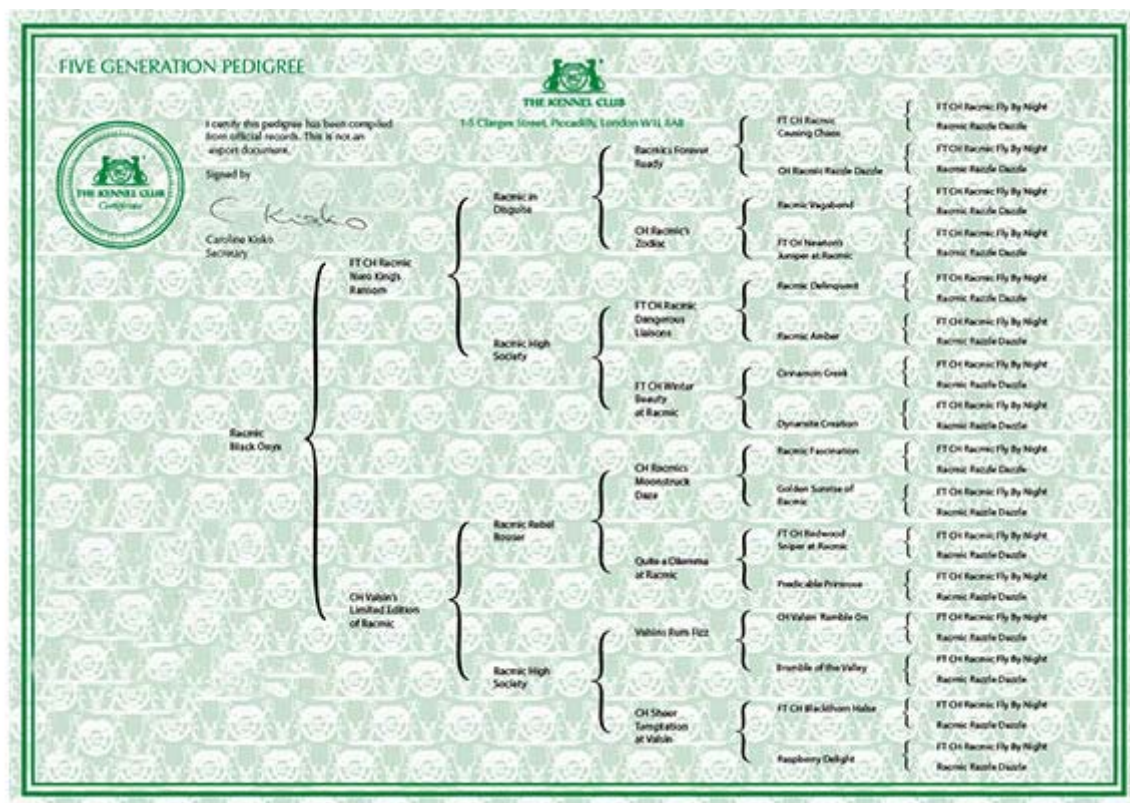


Figure 8: An example of a five-generation pedigree produced by the Kennel Club<sup>42</sup>

Pedigree diagrams such as the one pictured here are especially useful tools in transferring social capital by transforming genealogical relationships between

<sup>40</sup> Both these examples – Kenine and Kenmillex – are prefixes used by the Kennel Club to name puppies whose breeders do not have their own kennel names. I have used the Kennel Club's own kennel names in this case in order to avoid unwittingly using the kennel name of a breeder.

<sup>41</sup> For similar discussions of pedigree and social capital in horse breeding, see Cassidy, 2002; Hurn, 2008.

<sup>42</sup> Kennel Club (2016) 'Shop: Pedigree Certificates.'

<http://www.thekennelclubshop.org.uk/products/application-for-pedigree-certificates> [accessed 17/06/2016]



dogs – and relationships between humans and dogs – in to a visible form (see Bouquet, 1996). In doing so, the documents draw on the authority vested in diagrammatic representations to give – as W.H.R. Rivers observed – recognition to particular biological and social ties (c.f Mair, 1965:69). Mapping these ties, pedigrees lend credibility to claims frequently made by breeders about the inherent quality of their stock and the nobility of breeding. The visibility of dogs and breeders past is read as testament not only to the careful channelling of canine blood, but also to the transmission of physical characteristics and qualities of moral goodness that have been refined through generations of controlled breeding.

This ideology of progress, which permeates the community's notions of good breeding, is one facet of what Bamford and Leach (2009) refer to as 'genealogical thinking'; an ethic which prioritises notions of selection, transmission, and improvement, and which, as Cassidy (2009) notes, encourages a particular way of understanding forms of biological and social life (see also Hurn, 2008a, 2008b; Holloway et al., 2011). For one, the flow of information encoded in pedigree diagrams – from one generation to the next – reinforces a particular sense of temporality, one which lends authority to selective breeding by focusing on a breed's supposed improvement through generations of human interference in its evolution. As Cassidy observes, 'The genealogical model is a theory of attribution. It fixes the direction of time by granting special status to temporal anteriority' (2009:24). After all, in the pedigree goodness comes from those that have gone before, and 'the explanation for the present [rests] in the properties of the past' (2009:24). These multidirectional flows, coupled with notions of heredity as a key source of value and moral virtue, mean that the histories of breeds and bloodlines play a major part in the evaluation of current dogs. While the specific temporal quality of a show-world pedigree encourages the observer to look towards the past, it also brings the past directly into the present. With no official record of her ancestry, the unregistered Pug which Mabel and I encounter at the dog show is a site of both genealogical and moral uncertainty. Despite the fact that her body is close to the idealised image of her breed, there can be no certainty

as to whether this is the result of responsible, careful breeding or merely an anomaly thrown up by 'nature' in what is otherwise a badly-bred – and possibly cross-bred – lineage. In short, the fact that the Pug is unregistered automatically disqualifies her from consideration for the most basic show-world category – the 'good' dog.

As for dogs that *are* registered with the Kennel Club, the five-generation pedigree that the Kennel Club issues upon registration<sup>43</sup> identifies each dog as a composite of 62 named canine ancestors, many of whom the owner of a newly registered dog is unlikely to have met. Yet as W.H.R Rivers noted as far back as 1910, pedigrees grant access to 'the dog beneath the skin'. When identified in a pedigree, ancestors 'become real personages', even in the minds of those who have never seen them (Rivers, 1968 [1910]:105). That said, while show-world pedigrees make visible the names of certain individuals and relationships, others are hidden from view, which raises questions of who, or what, goes unseen. As Mary Bouquet notes of the tree imagery on which pedigree diagrams are modelled:

'Its image of perfection glosses over the click of secateurs, the sawing, hacking and crashing of fallen branches, the killings off, that are responsible for its shape' (1996:60).

Pedigrees, after all, chart patterns of lineal decent. The only names included in the diagrams are those of the two parents of each dog, and so, despite the fact that dogs usually have a number of siblings from their own litter – and often tens, if not hundreds of full and half siblings from other litters – the existence of these close relatives is not made apparent. The presence of a dog in a pedigree thus includes the animal in a specific set of relations while simultaneously distancing it from a wider network. As Schneider observes, pedigrees might represent

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<sup>43</sup> Five-Generation is the standard format of a show-world pedigree, and these are made available – at a cost – to all owners of registered dogs.

biological relationships, but biology itself is very much a social category (1984:55).



Figure 9: An example of an 'Enhanced' Five-Generation Pedigree printed by The Kennel Club, which shows the names of Champion dogs in red.<sup>44</sup>

In their very nature, then, pedigree documents hide from public view the majority of a dog's close relatives. For instance, due to the linearity of the pedigree diagram, only animals that have produced one or more offspring will ever appear in the pedigrees of other dogs, whereas those that do not reproduce are effectively erased from the ancestral record and the genealogical matrix of the breed. A breeder's decision whether a dog is good enough to breed from is therefore key to the legacy of both the dog and their ancestral bloodline. That this

<sup>44</sup> Kennel Club (2016) 'Shop: Pedigree Certificates.'  
<http://www.thekennelclubshop.org.uk/products/application-for-pedigree-certificates>  
 [accessed 17/06/2016]

is a serious concern is apparent in the much vaunted pedigrees that show multiple generations of Champion dogs, suggesting the direct, concentrated flow of Champion qualities from individuals of one generation to the next. In short, a good pedigree signifies the channelling of good qualities through skilled, careful breeding practice at the hands of virtuoso breeders. Arguably, however, this perception is enabled by a system which erases the majority of non-Champion, below-standard siblings from public view. Likewise, the impression that a bloodline is free from disease can be sustained if only one dog from each generation is 'good' or 'healthy' enough to breed from. Yet, as this thesis argues, what 'good health' and 'responsible breeding' mean in the show-world is often at odds with what these terms are taken to mean in other contexts.

### Standard-Fitting Show Dogs

A Kennel Club pedigree might qualify a dog for entry into a dog show, but in order for a dog to hold material and moral significance in the show-ring – and so be considered 'good' – its appearance needs to fit closely with the image of the ideal breed specimen as described in the Breed Standard. These documents, maintained and published by The Kennel Club, detail a standard of excellence which – in longstanding show world tradition – breeders should aspire to produce in their kennels and which judges should reward in the show-ring. The first Breed Standards were written in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, by which time an obsession with taxonomy, specimen collection, and standardisation had permeated much of Western society. In this era of empire and exploration, collectors and students of the 'natural world' required a means by which to record and communicate their findings. Soon, illustrations became a widespread means by which knowledge of other species – plant, insect, and animal – was recorded, reproduced, and distributed. Faced with the variations and anomalies of individual specimens, illustrators followed Linnaeus in producing what Daston and Galison have termed 'reasoned images', which, as the authors observe:

‘aspired to generality – a generality that transcended the species or even the genus to reflect a never seen but nonetheless real ... archetype: the reasoned image ... was truer to nature – and therefore more real – than any actual specimen’ (Daston & Galison 2007:60).

So, at a time when objectivity and standardisation were emerging as dominant ideological frameworks in scientific practice, ‘nature’ and natural objects appeared riddled with variation and misleading idiosyncrasies. Dogs were no exception, but dog breeders, like the upper-class breeders of livestock whose practices they emulated, embraced what Daston and Galison suggest had become the governing mentality: idealization and ‘the choice of the perfect over the imperfect’ (Daston & Galison 2007:15). By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the first Breed Standards were compiled, anatomists and naturalists producing images of specimens were firmly united in the view that:

‘what the image represented, or ought to represent, was not the actual individual specimen before them but an idealized, perfected, or at least characteristic exemplar of a species or other natural kind’ (Daston & Galison 2007:42).

To this day, the Standard for each breed describes the ideal specimen in a series of passages which covers General Appearance, Characteristics, Temperament, Head and Skull, Eyes, Ears, Mouth, Neck, Forequarters, Body, Hindquarters, Feet, Tail, Gait/Movement, Coat, Colour, Size, and Faults.<sup>45</sup> The Breed Standard for Mabel’s Pugs, for instance, describes the ideal dog as having a head which is:

‘relatively large and in proportion to body, round, not apple-headed, with no indentation of skull. Muzzle relatively short, blunt, square, not upfaced. Nose black, fairly large with well open nostrils.’

The ideal Pug’s eyes are:

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<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Kennel Club (2014) ‘Bulldog Breed Standard’ <http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/services/public/breed/standard.aspx?id=4084> [accessed 21/11/2014].

‘Dark, relatively large, round in shape, soft and solicitous in expression, very lustrous, and when excited, full of fire.’

As for its ears:

‘Thin, small soft like black velvet. Two kinds – ‘Button ear’ – ear flap folding forward, tip lying close to skull to cover opening. ‘Rose ear’ – small drop ear which folds over and back to reveal the burr.’<sup>46</sup>

And so on. As in other Breed Standards, the highly detailed, partially emotive, and somewhat obscure descriptions of the ideal Pug presume that the reader is closely familiar with show-world knowledge of the breed. To borrow from Daston and Galison, Breed Standards – like classificatory atlases of the natural world – ‘simultaneously assume the existence of and call into being communities of observers who see things in the same ways’ (Daston & Galison 2007:27). In short, these documents make collective empiricism among dog breeders possible.

The general consensus among breeders is that regular study of Breed Standards – along with practical experience in the kennel and the show-ring under the guidance of senior breeders – trains the critical vision of the beginner and sharpens the analytical eye of the expert. Studying Breed Standards, then, teaches observers to approach, assess, and respond to the bodies of dogs in particular ways. Firstly, observers are encouraged to focus on the breeder’s realisation of the image of the breed as it appears in the body of the dog, rather than on the dog as a holistic being. Secondly, Breed Standards further encourage the conceptual breakdown of a dog’s visible body into a series of parts which can be assessed in relation to – but also independently of – one another. Many dogs are viewed as ‘good’ examples of their breeds apart from one or two features, yet the significance of any particular feature varies according to the breed and its perceived importance vis-à-vis the breed’s original function. That is, some breed-defining features are considered so essential that flaws might be overlooked if

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<sup>46</sup> Kennel Club (2015) ‘Pug Breed Standard.’  
<http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/services/public/breed/standard.aspx?id=6164> [accessed 18/12/2015]

the dog is otherwise ‘excellent’, whereas dogs whose bodies don’t display these features at all are effectively denied membership of their breeds.

Of course, Breed Standards are merely written descriptions, but, like Linnaen illustrations, they have the potential to problematise variations in individual specimens. What is more, they effectively arrest the development of a species or breed at a particular point in time. However, as critics of the show-world are often keen to point out, in the decades since Breed Standards were first set, the appearance of dogs in many breeds has changed dramatically; this despite the fact that few of these written descriptions have undergone significant change. Today, most in the show-world are quick to defend Breed Standards as the generalised ideal, arguing that the descriptions do not depict the image of any specific dog at a particular point in time. The rationale seems to be that the descriptions which comprise Breed Standards are largely subjective and will be interpreted differently depending on the context. Yet despite this high degree of subjectivity, most breeders are quick to agree that anyone who knows a breed and its Standard will be able to make an educated guess as to whether or not the animal has been ‘well-bred’. As Pug breeder Mabel observes:

‘We [show-breeders] all have our own ideas about what a Standard-fitting dog should look like, but I can look round a show-ring at other breeders’ dogs and have a good idea of how and why they’ve interpreted the Standard in their own way.’

The result of all this flexible interpretation is that, while one breeder’s preferred type of dog might not be to the taste of his or her peers, a shared appreciation of technical artistry leads to a basic level of respect among most show-breeders, particularly among those who have long breeding careers. Skilled, careful practice is key, whether or not the final product is to the exact liking of a particular observer. As Didier Fassin puts it, ethical virtue ‘does not depend on a specific morality, but on a particular form of engagement in practices’ (2014), and in the show-world, well-bred dogs are recognised as the product of their breeder’s workmanship. In other words, good dogs are akin to objects of virtu;

they are interesting and desirable due to their aesthetic beauty and the craftsmanship involved in their production. Thus, an appreciation for well-bred dogs signals the refined taste of the virtuoso breeder as both a creator and a connoisseur. The ability to produce and appreciate Standard-fitting pedigree dogs signals the ethical and practical virtuosity of breeders and judges in the show-world.

As I discuss at greater length in the next chapter, good breeding is understood to be visible in the bodies of dogs, but can only be observed through the eyes of a skilled breeder. Yet much to the disappointment of show-world traditionalists, not all breeders develop the virtuoso's 'skilled vision' (Grasseni 2004), and not all are as stringent in upholding Breed Standards as some of their peers would wish them to be. Hence, not all show-breeders are seen by their peers as willing or able to take responsibility and care for the wellbeing of their dogs and breeds. The result, show-world traditionalists argue, is that the overall quality of many breeds is deteriorating. Mabel certainly shares this concern when it comes to Pugs, so much so that these problems become the overarching theme of many of our conversations. Aged 76 at the time we meet, Mabel is a retired school teacher from the north-east of England who has been breeding the small, short-faced dogs for over 40 years. During my 18 months in the show-world, we meet frequently at shows and spend many hours in conversation, both over the telephone and during my occasional visits to her home. Yet despite the unwavering enthusiasm with which Mabel talks about upcoming dog shows and her hopes for future success, she seems to leave each show in a state of profound disappointment. Most of these events are followed by a conversation about the decline of her breed. As she tells me during one discussion:

'Pugs are not what they were. They are not in a good state these days. I've been breeding these dogs for forty years, and I've seen the breed go downhill lately.'

At the root of the problem, Mabel suggests, is the rapid rise in public demand for puppies, which has resulted in a sharp increase in the breed population. She



claims that many Pugs today are bred by unskilled breeders who are merely out to make money. As she explains:

‘When I started, there were about 300 Pugs registered a year. Now we’re up to about 8,000. 85% of those are bred by people who don’t have a clue about the breed; they don’t show them, they just breed any two dogs together. Half of them are not even British – they’re bred by these awful puppy farmers in Eastern Europe ... They know nothing about the breed, they just churn out puppies ... The result is that we’re losing “breed type”.’

Good ‘type,’ Mabel tells me, is difficult to achieve but crucial to the wellbeing of future generations. In show-world literature it is described as ‘the sum of those points that make a dog look like its breed and no other’ (Horner, in Cole, 2004), although when asked to summarise what ‘type’ means to them, breeders I work with tend to refer to examples, rather than provide a universal definition for their breed. As with the realisation of Breed Standards, the concept is not prescriptive. Instead, it is a subjective prism through which the virtue of certain forms of practice comes into view in the bodies of particular dogs. What matters in the show-world is that, however they view it, responsible breeders engage with the notion of breed type and attempt to produce it in their practice.

Also by general consensus, the recognition and production of good breed type requires a particular engagement in traditional forms of show-world practice. As one breeder tells me, ‘Breed type is something that you get to know as you get to know the dogs.’ In other words, it is only possible to know good type once you have developed ‘an eye for the breed’. A ‘good dog’ should therefore be ‘typical’ of the breed and its Breed Standard, and even though each breeder and judge will have their own understanding of this Standard, it should be obvious to the trained onlooker that the dogs in a particular kennel have all been bred with the same image of a Standard-fitting dog in mind. Good practice involves consistency, another aspect of skilled practice which responsible breeders should aim to recognise and cultivate.

As Mabel often recalls, 'I used to be able to walk into a show-ring and tell you exactly who had bred what.' But, she tells me with regret:

'That was back when we had fewer people in this breed – just a few big kennels and dedicated breeders – not the hobby breeders we have today.'

Like Mabel, other experienced breeders agree that it takes time, effort, and sometimes many years of breeding to establish good breed type. 'People who breed one litter every couple of years are not going to produce the quality we used to see in this breed,' Mabel explains. 'For that, you have to be breeding a lot of litters and keeping only the best of the best.' Yet these traditional breeding practices, developed in step with dog showing traditions, differ from the practices of many current-day, small-scale breeders who, according to traditionalists such as Mabel, treat their dogs as pets rather than as members of their breeds. As I shall discuss at length in Chapter Two, the close relationships these breeders develop with their dogs is seen to obscure their perspective of the animals as members of their breeds. The result, Mabel insists, is that many breeders are no longer able to respond to the needs of pedigree dogs as parts of their breeds, so what counts as 'best' or even 'good' in the show-world is changing. Not only are many Pugs now missing the breed-specific 'trace' Mabel points out on the unregistered bitch at the dog show, but, she claims:

'Most [Pugs'] coats are wrong these days, either too long or too thin. And the heads are completely wrong in a lot of them, especially these ones from backyard breeders. A Pug should have equal up top and down below<sup>47</sup> ... the nose should be almost between the eyes. We see too many Pugs looking like Bulldogs these days. That's not what I would call good type – a dog should look like the breed it's meant to be.'

'You mean it should look like the image described in the Breed Standard,' I ask in response. 'Yes,' Mabel tells me, before warning me that this isn't as straight-

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<sup>47</sup> That is, the top and bottom half of the head should be equally balanced.

forward as it might sound. ‘This breed has been this way for over 2000 years,’ she explains. ‘You have to know more than just the wording of that Standard – you have to know the history if you’re going to understand this breed.’

## Breed Histories

While academic histories of pedigree dog breeding suggest that the vast majority of breeds emerged only in the last 150 years (see, for instance, Ritvo, 1987; Turner, 2010), most breeders tell a different story. As far as they are concerned, each breed has its own history which traces the breed’s development in its country of origin, often going back hundreds if not thousands of years. The many individual stories that have shaped these breed histories entangle humans and dogs in relationships which establish who and what counts as significant in the development of a breed, yet much like Breed Standards these histories at once unite and separate certain types of dogs and humans.

Show-world interpretations of breed histories require a specific understanding of what counts as ‘natural’ in particular breeds. For example, the Kennel Club claims that the Lhasa Apso:

‘comes from Tibet where many live at high altitude and the climate can be severe ... his long dense undercoat acts as insulation during winter, and the fall of hair over his eyes protects them from the wind, dust and glare’ (Kennel Club, 1998:210).



*Figure 10: The Lhasa Apso<sup>48</sup>*

It is by way of such stories that specific features described in Breed Standards gain significance. In the case of the Lhasa Apso, the dense undercoat and long fur are believed to enable the dogs to thrive in their ‘natural’ environment. This is often deemed to be as important as a dog’s visible compatibility with ‘traditional’ ways of life in the area where a breed is said to have originated. The website of one show-breeder dedicated to the Lhasa Apso, for example, claims:

‘It is impossible to separate out the Lhasa Apso from the Tibetan peoples’ strong practice of Buddhism ... over the hundreds of years that Lhasa Apsos have been bred and owned by Tibetans some of [the Tibetan] characteristics have become inherent ... they do not bark unless there is a reason, they are a calm and strong dog, they are loyal and excellent watch dogs.’<sup>49</sup>

Like the story of the Lhasa Apso, many other accounts present breeds as both ancient and authentic, bound in close relation with the people and places that

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<sup>48</sup> By Lhasaapso (Own work) [CC BY-SA 3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ALhasaapso.jpg> [retrieved on 07/07/2016]

<sup>49</sup> Tushita Lhasa Apsos (N.D.) ‘Origins of Lhasa Apsos.’ <http://www.lhasadogs.com/lhasaapsoshistory.htm> [accessed 08/01/2015].

feature in these accounts. Other histories suggest that particular breeds evolved with little human interference. The Beauceron Club, for example, reports that their breed:

‘has been established for hundreds of years and has changed very little throughout that time. This has resulted in making it one of the most natural and least exaggerated dogs in existence.’<sup>50</sup>



*Figure 11: The Beauceron*<sup>51</sup>

Likewise, the Cirneco dell’Etna, or ‘Sicilian Greyhound’ is presented as:

‘an ancient breed ... that has undergone very little manipulation by man. Instead the breed has been rigorously selected by nature for its ability to work for hours.’<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *The Beauceron Club UK* (ND) ‘The Beauceron’ Information leaflet collected at Crufts 2011.

<sup>51</sup> By Pretty.woman (Own work) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons.

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ABeaucerons.jpg> [retrieved 07/07/2016]

<sup>52</sup> *The Cirneco dell’Etna Breed Club UK* (2009) ‘The Cirneco dell’Etna’ ‘Information leaflet collected at Crufts 2011.

The 'untouched' appearance of these and other breeds is considered a significant virtue by many of their breeders. So when conversations turn to the health controversies surrounding pedigree dogs, breeders are often quick to insist that their breeds are not only in keeping with what 'nature' produces, but have remained unchanged for centuries, if not millennia. In *Ideas of Nature*, cultural historian and political theorist Raymond Williams suggests that the coming of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the emergence of theories of evolution opened Western culture up to a new imagining of nature as 'the selective breeder ... an actively shaping, indeed intervening, force ... which could do something as conscious as select' (Williams, 1980:73). Two centuries later, a similar understanding remains evident among show-breeders, while breed histories continue to support the notion that nature is an active agent, noticeably crafting the bodies of pedigree dogs.

However, although the bodies and behaviours of many breeds are framed as the products of 'nature', lack of change is not necessarily attributed to lack of human intervention. Rather, most breeders believe that human intervention has ensured that their breeds have remained 'pure' and true to their 'natural' form. While these breeds are understood to have evolved in their 'natural environment', at least up to a certain point, once the point of 'natural' perfection is realised, it becomes the responsibility of a breed's human guardians to attempt to isolate it from nature and what is henceforth deemed an 'unnatural' process of change. From this moment of perfection onward, stasis, rather than change, is viewed as the natural course of life, and dogs selectively bred to fit in this static, standardised image are celebrated as both natural and virtuous. Moreover, beyond this evolutionary apex, nature herself becomes a force liable to bring about negative change in the bodies of dogs. Crucially, then, nature and breeders are *both* seen as agents who shape the bodies of dogs. Translated into Bruno Latour's terms (2005), the show-world view is that both nature and breeders are mediators of agency. They are agents in their own right who can act independently of others. At the same time, however, the genes and/or bloodlines of pedigree dogs are merely seen as intermediaries which channel both the

agency of nature and that of humans, ultimately to become manifest in the animals' bodies.

In the show-world, then, the 'natural' form of a canine body is not only the product of 'nature' in the sense of the natural world and its processes. Rather, the term 'natural' is often used idiomatically to suggest propriety, to indicate that something is as it *should* be. In other words, the term 'natural' is not primarily used in reference to that which stems from 'nature', but to indicate the moral order in the sense of propriety. In this context, it describes the virtue of bodies produced in the course of virtuous practice. So, in keeping with what Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park (2001) have shown to be a long tradition in Western thought, some forms of life may be the product of 'nature' and yet 'unnatural' in the moral sense. However, despite their apparent attempts to control the bodies and behaviours of their dogs, few breeders feel that the purebred project contradicts their frequent claims about the 'natural' authenticity of their breeds. Rather, as Rebecca Cassidy argues, in the tradition of British animal breeding, nature:

'is perceived as a recalcitrant but talented child who refuses to fulfil its own potential and so must be strongly directed [through selective breeding]' (Cassidy 2002:9).

In line with this view, the show-world perspective frames selective breeding as a process in which breeders aim to work with the agency of nature, rather than suppress it, even if the working relationship between breeders and the forces of nature is, at times, uneasy. After all, breeders argue, the process of selection began in nature and breeders are merely continuing it. As a breeder of Alaskan Malamutes – a large sled dog breed similar in appearance to Huskies and wolves – explains, 'Our breed evolved in a specific environment, and it is naturally adapted to it.' Selective breeding, this breeder claims, 'enhanced some features, but only in the way nature intended.' In her opinion, 'The Inuit people relied on these dogs to survive. They wouldn't have bred them in ways that didn't suit the natural environment'. Yet while many breeds like the Malamute are said to have

originated in wild landscapes alongside 'natural' human beings, the general consensus is that the subsequent refinement of these breeds continued in the hands of a distinguished class of breeder who held the ability to extend and perfect the work of the natural world. The Coton de Tulear, for example, is claimed by its dedicated UK breed club to be 'a very old breed originating on the island of Madagascar'.<sup>53</sup> As the breed club claims:

'In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, this little white dog survived a shipwreck off Madagascar ... the dogs made it to shore ... became wild, and bred with the local terriers. The Coton de Tulear resulted from this relationship. The natives fell in love with these little white dogs and offered them to King and Malagasy nobles ... Coton ownership was restricted to the nobility... it quickly became known as "The Royal Dog of Madagascar"'.<sup>54</sup>

Although the Coton de Tulear is claimed to have originated in the wild among the 'natives', it was only once the dogs fell into the cultivated and cultivating hands of the well-bred nobility that the breed was refined to reach its 'natural' state of perfection. Show-world admiration of pedigree dogs as 'natural' creatures does not, then, depend on the denial of human involvement. On the contrary, in many breeds human labour is seen to be key in realising the natural, essential qualities of a breed, and this labour is both acknowledged and appreciated. According to the Basset Hound Club, for instance, the history of their breed can be traced back to 8<sup>th</sup> century France and St. Hubert, a nobleman-turned-monk who dedicated his life 'to God, and breeding the perfect hound for tracking game.'<sup>55</sup> The Club's account of the breed's history claims that the Basset soon became a favourite with the French aristocracy and 'influential French noblemen' who brought the dogs

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<sup>53</sup> *Coton de Tulear Club of the United Kingdom* (ND) 'The Coton de Tulear'. Information leaflet collected at Crufts 2010.

<sup>54</sup> *Coton de Tulear Club of the United Kingdom* (ND) (ibid.)

<sup>55</sup> *Basset Hound Club* (2011) 'Basset Hound History.'

[http://www.bassethoundclub.co.uk/documents/basset\\_hound\\_history.pdf](http://www.bassethoundclub.co.uk/documents/basset_hound_history.pdf) [accessed 08/09/2014].



to England during the Norman Conquest. Even at this early time, the anatomy of the breed is said to have adapted to suit its role in the hunt:

‘[the dogs’] short legs meant huntsmen could follow easily on foot, while their powerful noses, aided by the scent-trapping heavy ears and wrinkles, gave them unmatched tracking ability.’<sup>56</sup>

Yet although Basset Hounds reportedly originated in France, The Kennel Club maintains that the breed was only ‘developed to perfection in Britain over the last century’ (Kennel Club, 1998:20).



*Figure 12: The Basset Hound*<sup>57</sup>

Such origin myths are far from unique. Many other breed histories speak of both racial, spatial, and temporal distance between populations of wild and cultivated dogs and wild and cultivated humans. Yet what is clear from show-world discourse is that forms of life perceived as wild or cultivated can both be understood as essentially and inherently natural or, indeed, unnatural. The concept of nature, as Adam Reed notes, ‘continues to nuance the twists, turns, and risks’ of ethical life and is ‘fundamental to ethical reasoning’ (2015:4).For

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<sup>56</sup> *Basset Hound Club* (2011) (ibid.)

<sup>57</sup> By Csucs (Own work) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ABodza.08.02.10.a.jpg> [retrieved 07/07/2016]

instance, it is a commonly held view that, like the Basset Hound, many breeds only reached a state of perfection – or near perfection – once their evolution was shaped by the skilled hands of virtuoso breeders in the kennels and show-rings of Western Europe. Accordingly, cultivation – the skilled development and nurture of positive traits and characteristics – is respected as the continuation of a virtuous process of refinement which began in nature: an understanding closely tied to notions of improvement inherent in the show-world's genealogical thinking.

So, those who see the bodies of pedigree dogs as objects of virtu – that is, as objects of aesthetic beauty and craftsmanship – accord them material and moral significance in line with historical understandings of the way these bodies have been co-produced by the forces of nature and the work of skilled breeders. Good dogs are those in which the agency of these two sets of actors has been appropriately balanced in the course of their breeders' interventions. The success of a breeder's attempt to properly cultivate the body of a given dog can be measured against the dog's physical proximity to the description of the ideal breed specimen as laid out in the Breed Standard, backed up by the breed history, and interpreted according to re-imaginings of the breed's original lifestyle and function. The virtuoso breeder, then, is one who takes her cues from a very particular understanding of nature and a subjective interpretation of what is natural in both a practical and a moral sense. In doing so, she takes her own steps to ensure the virtuosity of her practice.

In the show-world, this much is clear: cultivation through controlled, selective breeding allows breeders to realise and reproduce the 'natural' essence of a breed. Selective breeding is therefore of vital importance to those who seek to restore and preserve what is 'good' – that is, the pedigree dog in the natural image of its breed. But although breeders frequently use breed histories as rhetorical devices with which to legitimize Breed Standards, the sources of these histories are often vague and difficult to verify. In most cases, evidence is drawn from historical documents and their descriptions or visual representations of dogs

which breeders claim to be the forbearers of modern breeds. The most substantial source of information on breed histories is no doubt The Kennel Club, which provides public access to Europe's largest library of dog-related books, newspapers, journals, registration archives, and rare canine ephemera.<sup>58</sup> Smaller, private collections are also held by breed clubs, most of which appoint a member of their committee as official 'breed historian', and many individual breeders keep their own collections of artefacts and documents. Most books about dogs, however, do not reference any sources for the many claims they make about events featured in breed histories, which, although usually recounted in the style of folk-law, are nonetheless used by breeders to support their argument about the authenticity of Breed Standards.

The most objective historical authority is therefore found in visual representations of dogs from days past. Most significant are pre-19<sup>th</sup> century paintings, drawings, and carvings which depict dogs in a time before Breed Standards had been formalised. During my initial meeting with a group of Scottish Deerhound breeders in central Scotland, for instance, I am urged to visit the National Museum in Edinburgh, where I will be able to view depictions of 'Deerhound-type dogs' on Roman pottery fragments that were found on the west coast of Scotland and date back as far as to the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Better still, I am told, the museum also houses a large Pictish stone tablet carved around 800AD.

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<sup>58</sup> Kennel Club (2015) 'The Kennel Club Library.' <http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/our-resources/the-library/> [accessed 08/07/2015]



*Figure 13: Carvings on the Hilton of Cadboll stone which apparently depict early Deerhound-type dogs on a hunt.<sup>59</sup>*

This ancient relic features what breeders claim to be Deerhounds on a hunt. Reflecting the ‘genealogical thinking’ and temporal anteriority that shape life in the show-world, Deerhound breeders see this ancient representation of their dogs as a link to the breed’s current forms and thus as proof of its authenticity. By association, they argue, it further proves the virtue of breeders’ attempts to preserve the bodies of the dogs in their established ‘natural’ image. As critics often point out, however, some historical representations may well appear to *resemble* modern breeds, but most depictions show animals whose appearance is markedly different from modern populations. Yet despite such visual counter-proof of their retrospective rationale, many breeders remain adamant that these artworks nonetheless signal the authenticity of their breeds. After all, these are

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<sup>59</sup> Photo author’s own.

images which were created in a time before the ideal form of many breeds had been cultivated. Temporal anteriority, it seems, has its limits. Despite the fact that history is the primary source of its legitimacy, what is considered to be the most 'natural' and 'authentic' state of a breed is reached at the point when it is removed from history with the formalisation of the Breed Standard.

### The Image of a Breed

Breed Standards were initially drafted by specialists and informed members of Breed Clubs on behalf of the Kennel Club. Additions and revisions have been made to most over the years, but, the Kennel Club insists, these revisions are always, 'the subject of considerable discussion in the first instance between the members of the Breed Club in order to decide *what features of the dog are most advantageous to fit the purpose for which the type was selected*' (Kennel Club, 1998:10, italics added). This is a particularly important point to note with regard to the show-ring development of all breeds: the descriptions that comprise the Breed Standard are understood to relate, first and foremost, to the original purpose and function of the breed. The guiding principle is that a Standard-fitting body has to be indicative of both working ability and health. Likewise, health and working ability are seen to rely on a body which fits the Breed Standard.

In most breeds, function and working ability are held to be of great importance yet are rarely, if ever, put to the test, at least among dogs bred for the show-ring. This is not to say that there are no working pedigree dogs in the UK – far from it. In fact, many purebred dogs regularly engage in practices of herding, tracking, coursing, catching, retrieving, pulling, and guarding, either in the job for which their breed was developed, or in a role to which it has more recently been assigned. But although work and show types can both be registered with The Kennel Club, the two are almost always kept as phenotypically distinct, genetically separate groups. In the vast majority of cases, breeders of working dogs opt for a markedly different type of dog to those favoured by exhibitors of show-dogs, with breeders of working dogs claiming that their own type is better

suited – both in terms of anatomy and temperament – to carry out its job. As this thesis argues, virtue is to be found embedded in practice, yet in relation to contemporary working practices, show-world claims about the virtuous bodies of pedigree show-dogs are somewhat suspect. Few show-breeders, however, accept that the physical differences between current working and show-dogs challenge the merit and indeed the virtue of either show-dogs or dog showing practice. Rather, show-breeders often argue that modern-day working trials are unrepresentative of the original work that their breeds were developed for, which is to say that they are not an accurate measure of a dog's fitness to perform the breed's original function. Accordingly, what is understood to be a breed's natural, inherent ability to perform a certain task is cast as historical. It is treated as a thing of the past, fixed at a particular moment in time, lost to the modern world through the corruption of working practices, but preserved in the kennel and the show-ring through the Breed Standard. The challenge felt by breeders of show-dogs, then, is preserve in the bodies of their dogs the potential to return to a lost way of life. As far as these show-breeders are concerned, breeding to the Standard is the only sure way to produce dogs of an original working type, and also the only way to ensure that pedigree dogs meet with a key show-world criteria: a good dog is inherently 'fit for function'.

### Fit for Function

Show-breeders insist that the phrase 'fit for function' was in frequent use in the show-world for many years prior to 2008, when it was used by The Kennel Club as the tagline for their 'Fit for Function: Fit for Life' campaign. This ongoing campaign promotes the view that 'every dog, even if its function is solely to be a pet, should be able to see, breathe and walk freely.'<sup>60</sup> While all breeders I question agree that dogs should be healthy enough to fulfil their intended function, most are at odds with the Kennel Club as to what exactly the function of a pedigree dog is. As Kennel Club representatives stress, the vast majority of pedigree dogs in the

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<sup>60</sup> Kennel Club (2010) <http://fitforfunction.org.uk> [accessed 7/2/2013]

UK – including the majority of puppies bred by show-breeders – are owned by members of the public and kept solely as pets, rather than as show dogs.<sup>61</sup> In spite of this, many breeders agree that ensuring their dogs are fit to function as pets amounts to sacrificing important characteristics of their breeds. This view is summed up in an article in *Dog World* newspaper, in which two well-known judges bemoan the fact that:

‘No one expects the Brussels Griffon or the Yorkshire Terrier to catch rats in today's urban environment, but surely this should not be a justification to change their original breed type. Neither do we expect the Shar Pei to function as a fighting dog, but this is no reason why it should not have enough folds of skin on its shoulders to enable it to turn, if gripped by an attacker’ (Lehtinen & Lummelampi, 1996).

Breed-typical characteristics, in other words, may no longer serve a practical purpose, but breeders do not see this as a reason to neglect these aspects of their breeds in favour of more generic, ‘pet’-type dogs. Standing ring-side at a dog show in late 2012, a Neapolitan Mastiff breeder sums up the views of many other informants:

‘People don’t understand that these dogs are not bred just to be pets. They were bred for a specific purpose, and we need to retain that function. That’s what we talk about when we say ‘fit for function’: the original function of the breed. A lot of breeds weren’t bred to go for five mile walks or some of the other things pet owners seem to expect.’

Breed-typical features and the original functions with which they are associated are, as the same Neapolitan Mastiff breeder later tells me, ‘natural for these breeds.’ By the same token, he claims, ‘turning these dogs into pets is unnatural – it’s not the lifestyle they were bred for and it’s unfair to the dogs.’ Function, as show-breeders understand it, is to be viewed in the context of a breed’s history, not with regard to the lifestyles of the breed’s current incarnations. Furthermore, life as a pet is not considered a ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ life for dogs of many breeds,

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<sup>61</sup> Interview with Kennel Club Secretary Caroline Kisko, (November 2011) Kennel Club Buildings, London.



so the difficulties some pedigree dogs experience as a result of breed-specific features are understood in the show-world to be the result of inappropriate or unnatural lifestyles in the company of pet owners. While a Bulldog might struggle to walk a mile on a warm summer afternoon, some argue that this is neither a fair test of its fitness nor of its ability to function. Function, then, is breed-specific, and practices which are inherently alien to a breed are not appropriate contexts in which to assess the fitness – or the virtue – of these dogs. Sure, Bulldogs are no longer pitted against bulls, but the logic of the show-community maintains that if the image of the dog fits with the image of its ‘working’ ancestors, then fitness, function, health, and wellbeing are all implied. Once again, the fact that the skilled cultivation of pedigree dogs is viewed as the extension of a ‘natural’ process – both in relation to nature and in the sense of moral propriety – ties such claims to a wider discourse surrounding evolution and the development of niche-fulfilling bodies which frame the processes as inherently natural and – by association – as virtuous and good. Breeding and keeping dogs with their natural forms and functions in mind is, I argue, not only understood as virtuous, but also as vital to the continued wellbeing of dogs and their breeds.

### Dogs, or members of breeds?

A good dog, then, will function first and foremost as a member of its breed. But once a breed has been removed from its ‘natural environment’ or historical context, testing the dog for its original function becomes difficult, if not impossible. As many in the show-world see it, this means that the ability to assess a dog’s fitness now relies on the skilled vision of the dog show judge. Contrary to the widespread notion that dog shows are merely ‘beauty’ contests, many breeders and judges are adamant that the show-ring *does* test the ‘functionality’ of their dogs, arguing that the movement, or *gait*, of each animal is assessed as the dog is led around the show-ring.<sup>62</sup> As skilled breeders and judges see it, a dog’s ability to move correctly relies on the correct physical construction, and just as

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<sup>62</sup> In each class, handlers’ lead their dogs at a fast-paced trot around the circumference of the show-ring, and back and forth in front of the watching judge.



physical characteristics vary between breeds, so too does movement. In order to be considered good, an Otterhound, for example, should not move like a 'normal' dog but should instead display a 'breed-typical' 'shambling walk or shuffle ... a lazy manner of walking, barely lifting the feet' (Gilbert & Gilbert, 2014). Early in my fieldwork, I am put in touch with an Otterhound breeder named Jim who explains this to me as we sit together one morning, watching a parade of the large hounds lumber around a show-ring. This 'breed-typical' movement, he suggests, is related to the unusual construction of the Otterhound's hips:

'A vet will tell you that all Otterhounds have terrible hips, but that's not the case. [Otterhounds] are just constructed differently to other breeds. We think it's probably because, when they were in the [hunting] packs, hunting otters, they would have spent a lot of their time in water, so the hips have adapted ... The gait is a very important feature of this breed.'

A Championship Show judge later agrees with Jim:

'What you want to see in one breed is often quite different from the next. If I'm looking at an Otterhound, I want to see a shambling gait, whereas if I see a Spinone moving like that, I'd chuck it straight out of the ring.'

What is considered natural, normal, and good is, highly breed-specific – an understanding which again emphasises the virtue of breed-specific knowledge and reinforces show-world objections to any universalised notions of health and well-being. After all, the Otterhound is not the only breed which has its own 'typical' way of moving. According to the authoritative *Encyclopaedia of K9 Terminology*, a Bulldog should display a 'loose-jointed, shuffling sidewise [sic] motion which gives the characteristic 'roll'' (Gilbert & Gilbert, 2014). As for the larger Neapolitan Mastiff:

'Due to its massive structure, the characteristic movement ... is rolling and lumbering, not elegant or showy... [but] the swaying, padding, and loose joints [do] not interfere with the dog's endurance, as this breed

is not meant to run for long distances or times' (Gilbert & Gilbert, 2014).

Accordingly, the quality of a dog's movement is to be assessed only in relation to contexts which are deemed typical and natural for its breed, not in relation to a universal standard of 'healthy' movement promoted by critics, in particular by proponents of veterinary science.

Yet despite the apparent emphasis placed on breed-typical movement, many breeders report that – even within a breed – movement is often poorly understood. Among the many and detailed concerns of breeders and judges, this poor understanding stands out as a troublesome issue in most, if not all, breeds. The common complaint among breeders is that, nowadays, some judges reward 'sound' yet 'unnatural' movement over what is 'natural' and breed-typical. The point is stressed by two well-known judges writing in *Dog World* newspaper – an article which several breeders suggested I read. As the authors argue:

'In some breeds, function dictates movement. In others, there does not seem much logical explanation why a breed should move in a certain way -- except when the movement is part of the breed's heritage and deserves recognition ... The gait requirements of quite a number of breeds do not conform to the general conception of "sound dogs" ... There is no reason why they should, unless our aim is the identikit show dog' (Lehtinen & Lummelampi, 1996).

So, while a Basset Hound might not meet with public or veterinary understandings of soundness, these authors, like many other breeders, argue that 'a Basset Hound with a sound, crooked front will move soundly – for its breed' (Lehtinen & Lummelampi, 1996). And while understanding sound movement is considered to be important, 'understanding [breed] typical movement is essential if we are to preserve breed type.'<sup>63</sup> As these comments demonstrate, it is not necessarily 'soundness' that breeders are aspiring to produce in their dogs. Soundness, I am often told, is a basic and generic level of fitness apparent to the

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<sup>63</sup> Lehtinen, H. & Lummelampi, C. (1996) (Ibid.)

eyes of the all-rounder judges who lack the expert vision of the breed-specialist. In this sense, soundness is seen as something which can even detract from the fitness of a dog and the well-being of its breed. Again, and above all else, the show-ring demands that good breeders reproduce the authentic, breed-specific images described in Breed Standards. In the show-ring, a good dog is defined by its close proximity to the idealised image of its breed, and it is this close proximity that offers it the best chance of good health and wellbeing. Entry into the show-ring, however, ultimately relies on a dog's status as a purebred, pedigree dog – a status which can only be verified by Kennel Club registration.

### The 'Problem' of Unregistered Dogs

The value of registration is apparent in the way the show-world relates – or fails to relate – to dogs who – like the Pug that Mabel and I encountered at the dog show – are not registered with The Kennel Club. Unlike registered, non-Standard dogs, such as the ridgeless-Rhodesian Ridgebacks mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, unregistered dogs pose very little threat to the integrity of show-world gene pools, and they do so for one reason alone: the barriers imposed by the Kennel Club's registration system. Nonetheless, the growing number of deliberately produced Labradoodles and other 'designer crossbreeds' is a significant source of annoyance to many, including Mabel. Like many of her peers, Mabel argues that these dogs are being falsely marketed to puppy-buyers as a healthier alternative to pedigree dogs, usually on the basis that cross-breeds benefit from 'hybrid vigour'. Mabel's objections to designer cross-breeds are multiple but mainly find expression in the claim that no 'good' breeder will entertain breeding a dog which isn't registered with the Kennel Club. Consequently, she claims, designer dogs are inevitably the products of commercial enterprises which exploit their dogs along with their puppy-buying customers. More generally, however, Mabel's objections centre on the notion that cross-bred dogs are simply of a lower standard of quality than registered, pedigree dogs: an attitude which is more pronounced with regard to designer-crossbreeds but informs her opinions of all unregistered dogs.

Mabel is not alone in her attitude. Whatever a dog might look like, no show-breeder I come across will entertain the idea of buying a dog which is not Kennel Club registered. 'A non-registered dog is a mongrel, as far as show people are concerned,' opines one of the more forthright breeders I meet. 'It doesn't matter what it looks like, if the dog doesn't have a pedigree from the Kennel Club, then no show-breeder is going to touch it with a bargepole.' This is not to say that unregistered dogs are not present in some show-breeders' homes and kennels. Some weeks after my first meeting with Mabel, she introduces me to her close friend Susan, a breeder of Tyrolean Shepherds.<sup>64</sup> After a couple of months I learn that Susan is the owner of an unregistered bitch named Milly who, as far as I can tell, looks much like all of Susan's other Kennel Club-registered Tyrolean Shepherds. Susan is a relatively inexperienced breeder compared with Mabel, and 14-year-old Milly was her first experience of owning a 'purebred' dog. Susan's story is a familiar one among show-breeders: she came to her breed with little understanding of pedigrees or Kennel Club registration and bought Milly from a small-time breeder who did not enter her dogs in any shows but who, Susan remembers, was 'very friendly and seemed to care about them.' It was only when Susan visited a dog show and talked to other breeders that she realised Milly had neither the kennel name, nor the registration certificate, nor even the pedigree that show-breeders consider to be of vital importance. Without these signifiers, Milly, like other unregistered 'purebred' dogs, remains outside the genealogical matrix and the historical and temporal structures of the breed. As Susan soon realised, in the show-world those with no history have no value. Thus, they cannot be 'good' dogs.

Like many other novice exhibitors, Susan soon realised that, in order to participate and make a name for herself in the show-world, she would have to acquire 'better dogs'. Like many other newcomers, Susan was encouraged by more experienced breeders to follow their example by retiring Milly – or any

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<sup>64</sup> A pseudonym

other dog who wouldn't make it in the show-ring – to a 'pet home'. In Susan's words:

'Most breeders will tell you to get rid of anything you can't show because it'll clutter up your kennel. I can understand that – breeders need good dogs and most don't have room to keep everything, but I wouldn't do that with any of mine.'

Instead, Susan chose to keep Milly and have her neutered. 'Why is neutering important?' I ask as Susan recounts the decision. 'Oh, you can't have an unregistered dog that's not neutered,' she tells me, laughing. 'People would assume I was going to breed from it – there'd be no end to the whispers going around.' Neutering, as I come to realise, is a means by which the 'bad' in 'badly-bred' dogs can be nullified. Once they are unable to reproduce, non-Standard or unregistered dogs are no longer a threat to their breeds, so while they remain of zero value in the show-community, they are no longer perceived as a threat to the anatomical or moral hygiene of the breed.

In the show-world, neutering 'bad' dogs is seen as the moral duty of responsible, 'good' breeders and owners, yet neutering a good dog is strongly discouraged – at least until the animal has fulfilled its potential in the show-ring and – crucially – until the dog has reproduced. 'What use is a neutered dog?' Susan asks with a blank look on her face when I raise the issue. 'You can't show it, you can't breed from it. It's just a pet.' In other words, the value of a Kennel Club-registered dog in the genealogically-minded show-world is nullified by neutering, just like the threat posed by the reproductive potential of unregistered dogs. While a good, registered dog is only useful if it remains 'entire', as breeders put it, a 'bad', unregistered dog can be made 'better' by neutering. In either case, though, a neutered dog, whether registered or not, is 'just a pet' in the eyes of show-breeders. The procedure effectively transforms pedigree dogs from members of a breed into individuals. It reduces show dogs or breeding stock to pets.

On the other-hand, Susan is adamant that her decision to have the unregistered Milly neutered, 'saved my reputation, and hers.' When we talk, she frames the surgery as a necessary act of care for herself, her dog, and their breed. And while Milly's status means that she will never enter a show-ring, some might argue that the life of an unregistered, neutered dog has its benefits. Unlike Susan's other dogs, Milly does not live as a kennel dog. Instead, she lives with Susan inside the house. And reflecting her absence from Susan's kennel, Milly is also absent from Susan's kennel website. On its numerous pages filled with the pictures, pedigrees, and show-records of her dogs, no mention is made of Milly. Indeed, it is only upon visiting her house that I finally realise Susan owns 14 dogs rather than the 13 she tells me about beforehand. After all, she tells me with a laugh, 'Milly doesn't count. She's just a pet.'

## Conclusion

To the show-world outsider, the multiple criteria which breeders use to assess the value and 'goodness' of dogs might well seem contradictory, and the notion that similar and related forms of goodness can reside both in a dog's pedigree and in its physical appearance might seem counter-intuitive. Yet my argument in this chapter has been that 'good' in the show-world does not merely refer to Standard-fitting bodies and value-laden pedigrees of well-bred show-dogs. Rather, both the ethical virtue and aesthetic virtuosity which define 'good' dogs are cultivated in the course of certain forms of engagement in show-world practice, and dogs are accorded pedigree dog status depending on their connections to pedigrees, breeders, Breed Standards, histories, and traditional show-world practices.

Firstly, I argue, good show-world practice produces pedigrees which signal not only the quality and value of the dog's genetic heritage but also the virtuosity of the breeders' whose kennel names appear in the document. A desirable pedigree is one in which the 'good' is made apparent, while everything that is not deemed good is hidden from view. As I have argued, more than the physical qualities of dogs are transferred from one life-form to another in the course of show-world

practice. Moral virtue is also continually transferred between dogs, breeds, and breeders, and this occurs through generations and across species lines. The goodness of a dog as a member of its breed does not, then, depend solely on the actions of the dog itself. Dogs are seen as aspects of a breed's wider genealogical matrix. As such, they cannot simply be known or thought about as individuals but only and always in relation to other dogs. Those in the show-world thus often use binaries to structure these relations and form a conceptual matrix which supports the pedigree project: purebred/mongrel; well-bred/badly-bred; good/bad; natural/unnatural. However, despite the ways in which some breeders think and talk about them, these are not always dichotomous relationships. The ethical dimensions of these binary oppositions are not always straightforward, and working out the relations between dogs and breeders assigned to various categories is an ongoing ethical project, which in turn has a significant bearing on show-world understandings of what breeders owe to particular dogs.

Secondly, I have argued that good practice produces Standard-fitting bodies which, at least in the view of show-world traditionalists, indicate that a dog is 'fit for function'. Among show-breeders of pedigree dogs, the term 'good' is synonymous with fitness – not in the sense of the 'objective' bio-scientific term, but rather in a particular situated understanding of fitness which is context-specific and measured in terms of a dog's perceived ability to fulfil the original function of its breed. In today's frequent discussions about health, it is this model of fitness to which show-world traditionalists refer when they evaluate and speak about the health of their dogs. In this sense, the definition of what is good and healthy is always situated in the context of a dog's breed and the associated breed history. While critics frequently cite the apparent tensions between the health of a breed and that of individual dogs, in the show-world it is the logic of health-as-fitness-to-function that reconciles the concepts of dog versus breed wellbeing. Yet as I have argued in this chapter, this show-world notion of health-as-fitness relies on a particular evaluative perspective and context. Without knowledge of a breed's history, onlookers lack the ability to foster a situated perspective on what

is good or healthy in a dog. As the show-breeders mentioned in this chapter demonstrate, what is considered normal and good is not only breed-specific but also practice specific. Proponents of traditional show-world practice tend to deem pedigree dogs that are subject to the regimes of care commonly provided to working dogs and pets to be sub-standard. In their eyes, pedigree dogs require a different kind of care due to their highly-specialised bodies, and it is the combination of their virtuousness and virtuosity that allows breeders to recognise and provide good care.

Like the earlier example of the unregistered Pug, the final example of Susan and her unregistered dog, Milly, demonstrates that purity, the community's highest virtue, is seen as the product of traceable human agency in the histories of pedigree dogs and their breeds. My argument here has been that Kennel Club registration speaks of a known history in which nature has been successfully subdued and is unlikely to exert the kind of unwelcome agency that might disrupt the natural order produced by the skilful cultivation of pedigree dogs. In counterpoint to this ideology, the two unregistered dogs I have mentioned should give some idea as to how show-world concepts of 'good' shape breeders' relationships with their animals, and dictate the extent to which breeders cultivate or resist affective engagement with them. Yet complicated as the answer may be, one thing has become clear in the course of this chapter and in the accounts of dog shows and conversations with breeders: pedigree show-dogs are mostly held at some remove from their human care-givers. Yet as I argue in the next chapter, in the context of traditional show-world practice, this physical and conceptual distancing between dogs and humans is itself an important and morally virtuous practice of care.





## Chapter Two – Good Breeders: Maintaining the Standard

‘I’m fuming. Absolutely fuming,’ Elinor tells me three seconds after I pick up the phone. ‘What about?’ I ask, unable to infer from the tone of her voice whether or not she is joking. ‘The Kennel Club.’ The three words, usually said with a near pious reserve, blast out of her like an insult, at which point I realise her outrage is genuine. Without missing a beat, she continues:

‘You’ll never guess who they’ve let in the *Accredited Breeder Scheme* [ABS]<sup>65</sup> now. That puppy farmer who lives down the road. Her. God knows how many times I’ve phoned [the Kennel Club] to tell them what she’s up to. And not only do they still register every bloody litter she breeds, but now they let her join the ABS. I’d like somebody to tell me what sort of accreditation she has, exactly ... As far as I know, she’s never even *been* to a dog show – wouldn’t know the [Breed] Standard if someone slapped her round the head with it. Anyway, that’s me out of it, now. I’ve always been loyal to the Kennel Club – I supported them right through *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*, you know – but this is too much. I’m quitting [the ABS] until the KC get their house in order. I won’t be lending my name to any scheme that lets people like *her* join.’

The woman Elinor is referring to has been the topic of many of our conversations since Elinor and I met three months previous. Her name is Sheila, and – according to Elinor and her allies – Sheila is known in the local area and throughout the national breed community as a prolific farmer of badly-bred West Highland White Terriers. Despite the fact that the two breeders have never met face-to-face, it seems that Sheila is never far from Elinor’s mind, and that her breeding

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<sup>65</sup> The name of the scheme was changed by the Kennel Club in 2011 from the *Accredited Breeder Scheme* to the *Assured Breeder Scheme*. Although this conversation took place after the change, Elinor continued to use the original term for some time.

practices are a constant source of anger and dismay. Along with a few other 'good' show-breeders, Elinor keeps a close eye on activities at Sheila's kennel, monitoring internet puppy-sales sites through which Sheila is known to advertise litters of puppies for sale. Elinor also uses the Kennel Club's breed registries to keep track of the number of litters Sheila is breeding as well as the number of times she breeds from particular bitches and dogs. 'I know for a fact she breeds unregistered litters as well as [Kennel Club] registered ones,' Elinor tells me several times. 'I've seen adverts for unregistered litters on the internet that list a different phone number, but I know they're hers. She breeds her bitches twice a year and registers one litter and not the next.' This is against the requirements of the Kennel Club's *Assured Breeders Scheme*, Elinor points out, but she claims that the organisation is 'happy to turn a blind eye to all these people like [Sheila] that keep on breeding extra litters in between without registering them.'<sup>66</sup>

It is not only Sheila's breeding schedules and her overuse of breeding bitches that Elinor finds objectionable. As much as she is incensed by what she perceives to be the exploitation of particular dogs, Elinor is just as angry at Sheila's apparent willingness to exploit her breed.<sup>67</sup> Much to Elinor's annoyance, Sheila is in the habit of posting images of puppies' pedigrees when she advertises litters for sale, drawing attention to the names of a few Champion dogs which are often listed in the fourth or fifth generation of ancestors, and to other ancestors bred by well-known breeders at prestigious kennels. 'Those breeders would be appalled to see what's happening to the good names of their kennels,' Elinor often claims on behalf of her colleagues. Essentially, she argues, Sheila 'has no idea about the [Breed] Standard, or how to go about breeding a good dog.'

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<sup>66</sup> A bitch's reproductive cycle is usually between six months and one year, meaning that many bitches can produce more than one litter each year, although no more than one will be registered by the Kennel Club

<sup>67</sup> Although Elinor is not directly involved with West Highland White Terriers, she claims a particular fondness for the breed and is apparently considering it as a 'retirement option,' as she put it, 'for when the Corgis get to be too much.'

The general consensus in the show-world is that caring for a breed involves active attempts to make sure that all dogs are bred to meet the image described in the Breed Standard. In practice, this means that breeders are expected to exhibit stock at dog shows in front of skilled judges whose expert evaluations of the dogs will help breeders to ensure that the ideal image of the breed is maintained. The imperative to 'test' the quality of breeding stock means that, as one breeder puts it:

'Most show-breeders think that anyone who doesn't show their dogs is a bad breeder ... if a breeder doesn't show, show-breeders will say the person doesn't care about the breed and is just a puppy farmer, in it for the cash.'

This seems to be the case with Elinor, who is adamant that, since Sheila fails to exhibit her dogs and breed towards the historical ideal laid down in the Standard, she is merely breeding to make money. As Elinor claims, Sheila 'just throws any two [dogs] together without any thought as to whether they're a good match or not.' Rather than skilfully exerting her own agency to shape the bodies of dogs, Sheila is perceived to be leaving things up to the forces of nature in a way which threatens to bring chaos and disorder to the breed. Elinor tells me that this is evident to skilled breeders like herself when they look at the mismatched pedigrees and the mismatched physical features of dogs from Sheila's kennel. 'She hasn't got an eye for the breed, you can tell by looking at those dogs,' Elinor insists. All this is to say that Sheila is seen to lack virtuosity, and is not what Elinor, nor other show-breeders, class as a 'good' breeder. Yet despite the weight of show-world opinion, the Kennel Club continues to register litters from Sheila's kennel, and has now approved her application to join their *Assured Breeder Scheme*.

By the time Sheila is inducted in 2011, the *ABS* has been up and running for seven years and claims a membership of over 7,500 UK-based dog breeders.<sup>68</sup> The scheme aims to distinguish good, responsible breeders from puppy-farmers and help members of the public make sound choices when buying puppies. Show-breeders have long argued that the Kennel Club needs to do more to discourage the commercial puppy trade, but while many feel that only ‘well-bred’ puppies from ‘good’ breeders should be registered by the Kennel Club, the organisation maintains that tighter registration criteria will drive non-show-breeders ‘underground’, leaving the Kennel Club with no influence whatsoever.<sup>69</sup> Instead of running this risk, the organisation has chosen to provide an additional option to ‘good’ breeders who are registering litters: they can join the *ABS* in order to ‘demonstrate their commitment to responsible dog breeding.’<sup>70</sup>

Much to the chagrin of many show-breeders, anyone can become a member of the *ABS* provided they pay the £10 annual fee<sup>71</sup> and comply with a list of regulations set by the Kennel Club. These regulations focus on animal husbandry practices, post-sales support to puppy buyers, and record-keeping. As I shall discuss in this chapter, few of these breeding practices are a source of virtue in the context of the show-world. Among other things, Assured Breeders are required to: permanently identify breeding stock by DNA profile, microchip or tattoo; keep and provide at the Kennel Club’s request written record of feeding, immunisation, and worming programmes; keep detailed records of all their dogs and breeding activities for at least a ten year period; and submit breeding stock to those health

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<sup>68</sup> Lambert, B., quoted in *Dog World* (05/08/2011) ‘ABS: New Name and New Goals.’

<sup>69</sup> Dean, Professor S. (28/01/2012) Speaking at ‘Dog Breeding and Health Seminar’, Croft Vets, Cramlington, Northumberland.

<sup>70</sup> Kennel Club (2012) ‘Assured Breeder Scheme.’ Available at: <http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/breeding/assured-breeder-scheme/> [last accessed 11/07/2015]

<sup>71</sup> In 2014, the Kennel Club announced plans to increase the fee to £30 in 2014, then to £45 in 2015, and £60 in 2016. See *Dog World* (03/01/14) ‘ABS Members Unhappy with Fee Increases.’ <http://www.dogworld.co.uk/product.php/106745/1/abs-members-unhappy-with-fee-increases> [last accessed 11/10/2015].

tests listed as 'required' in their particular breed.<sup>72</sup> When selling a puppy, Assured Breeders must, among other things: hand over to the buyer all of the puppy's Kennel Club registration documents; give clear explanation of any breeding endorsements; provide the new owner with written advice on continued socialisation, exercise, and training; provide reasonable post-sales telephone advice; draw up a contract of sale and provide the buyer with a copy; and provide any information about the breed 'that may enhance the puppy buyer's understanding of the puppy they [are] buying.'<sup>73</sup> Importantly, the rules of the *ABS* also require that all breeding stock is Kennel Club registered, and breeders are only allowed to use the scheme to promote the sale of Kennel Club registered puppies. A list of additional, non-enforceable recommendations 'strongly encourage' *ABS* members to ensure that 'whelping facilities accord with good practice,' and to 'follow relevant breed health screening recommendations.'<sup>74</sup>

In 2011, the scheme is policed by a national network of 24 'breeder advisors' – most of them volunteers from the show-community – who support *ABS* members and carry out kennel inspections.<sup>75</sup> Yet as many critics of the scheme are quick to point out, by 2011, less than 15% of *ABS* members have received a visit from an advisor.<sup>76</sup> Whether or not they have been inspected by the Kennel Club, though, as long as they agree to comply with the regulations of the scheme, a breeder can use the *ABS* logo on their website and paperwork, display their membership status in puppy-adverts, and add their name – along with information about

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<sup>72</sup> Kennel Club (2014) 'The Kennel Club Assured Breeder Scheme Standard.' Available at: <http://www.dogbreedhealth.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/KC-ABS-Standard-2.3-191114.pdf> [last accessed 15/07/2015]

<sup>73</sup> Kennel Club (2014) Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> For a full list of requirements can be found at:

<http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/breeding/assured-breeder-scheme/scheme-requirements-and-recommendations/> [last accessed 11/07/2015]

<sup>75</sup> Lambert, B., quoted in *Dog World* (05/08/2011) 'ABS: New Name and New Goals.'

<sup>76</sup> Harrison, J. (14/12/2013) 'Puppy buyers "being conned" by Kennel Club breeders scheme.' <http://pedigreedogsexposed.blogspot.co.uk/2013/12/puppy-buyers-being-conned-by-kennel.html> [accessed 21/07/2015].

available litters – to the Kennel Club’s own online database of Assured Breeders to which the organisation routinely directs all puppy enquiries.

The *ABS*, the Kennel Club insists, is a long-term plan to improve pedigree dog breeding in the UK. As Kennel Club officers are quick to acknowledge, most health tests for breeding stock are only recommended, rather than required, but, as staff members explain to me, the intention is to draw as many breeders as possible to the *ABS*. Once the scheme is well-established and puppy-buyers know only to buy from *ABS* members, the Kennel Club will introduce mandatory health-testing. Meanwhile, in 2011, the Kennel Club’s Health and Breeder Services manager tells me that, ‘We try to provide encouragement, rather than rules and regulations.’ After all, he adds, ‘The *ABS* has been the first guidance breeders have had on breeding practices. Before this, no one knew what was good or bad breeding.’ This may be the understanding at the Kennel Club, but Elinor and many of her show-world peers would disagree. As current and historical accounts from the show-world attest, since the later years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, show-breeders have been refining concepts of what are – and are not – good forms of breeding practice, and, by extension, who is – and is not – a good breeder.

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In the previous chapter, I argued that the quality and ‘goodness’ of a dog can be known by examining its pedigree and its body, rather than by encountering the dog as an individual, subjective being. As I hope to have shown, the ability to perceive goodness relies on the observer’s knowledge, and just as the goodness of a dog can only be truly appreciated by onlookers trained in the knowledge-practices of the show-world, the virtue of a breeder or judge is contingent on their cultivated ability to identify and appreciate that which is good. Further extending this argument, this chapter draws on recent anthropological work which seeks to ‘acknowledge the ubiquity of the ethical and to explore the ways in which it pervades ordinary speech, action, and the situations of persons living together’ (Lambek, 2010:10). My argument is that different people use the word ‘good’ to

signify different things, which leads to conflict and tension when these opposing parties communicate by using the same language with different meaning. In this case, the Kennel Club bases its claim that *Assured Breeder Scheme* members are good breeders on certain criteria with which scheme members must comply, but which differ in important ways from the criteria that are used to determine who counts as a good breeder in the show-world. This chapter focuses on show-world definitions of good, the criteria against which breeders' practices are measured, and the consequences for the evaluation and provision of care for both pedigree dogs and their breeds.

The argument I make here is that, in the tradition of the show-world, being a good breeder requires particular forms of engagement in care practices that serve the interests of both pedigree dogs and their breeds. Further developing my claim that good care in the show-world involves a combination of skill and moral virtue, I examine how breeders cultivate virtuosity in their practice. I discuss how breeders practice responsibility for ensuring that their breeds are perpetuated in their natural and proper forms, a task which involves ensuring that both genetic and phenotypic purity are maintained in current and future generations of dogs. I argue that the show-world imperative of improvement towards the abstract and subjective ideals of Breed Standards means that breeders and dog show judges must develop the visual skills necessary to evaluate the bodies of dogs in relation to this ideal, an ideal which, to recap, is seen as the continuously recalibrated collaboration of natural evolution and breeding programmes. After all, breeders must evaluate their dogs in order to decide if and how particular animals should be incorporated into these breeding programmes. In line with the show-world notion that producing Standard-fitting dogs is the best way to ensure the health and wellbeing of both dogs and breeds, I further argue that the skilled visual practices which support the project of breed preservation are vital show-world forms of care.

When referring to breeders' attempts to realise the idealised image of the breed, I follow W.J.T. Mitchell (2005) in his definitions of images and pictures. 'Image',



in Mitchell's use of the term, refers to 'any likeness, figure, motif, or form that appears in some medium or another' (Mitchell, 2005:xiii). In this case, I use the term 'image' to refer to the form of the idealised breed specimen; the idealised 'image' of the breed. The term 'object' is used to refer to 'the material support in or on which an image appears' (Mitchell, Ibid), and the term 'medium' refers to the material practices which relate the image to the object so as to bring the image into view. In this case, the 'object' is usually one of two things. Firstly, it might be a Breed Standard, a document in which the material practice of writing brings a description of the image into view in written form. Secondly, the object might be the body of a pedigree dog in which breeding practices attempt to create a 'picture' of the idealised image of the breed. The 'picture' that is the visible body of the dog is, then, a 'complex assemblage of virtual, material, and symbolic elements' (Mitchell, *ibid*). Thus, the picture is the *breeder's attempt* to bring into view through skilled breeding practices (medium) the breed ideal (image) in the body of a dog (object). From this point of view, the image of the breed ideal is always more than the picture, which itself can only ever be an approximation of the ideal, especially since breeders' relationships with the ideal are mediated by written descriptions that comprise Breed Standards. So, to develop a mental picture of the ideal, a breeder or dog show judge must learn to interpret the information in the Standard – hence my argument that specialist knowledge of pedigree dog breeds allows skilled observers to see the dog not just as a 'dog', but as a highly specialised and skilfully-produced breed specimen.

The skills necessary to evaluate the virtue of dogs in relation to their Breed Standard are generally thought to be challenging to develop, and, as this chapter will relate, require breeders to cultivate a situated knowledge of their dogs and breeds via practical engagements in the show-world. Here, the ethics of particular forms of visual practice come to the fore, as it is only through practical education in the company of their peers that breeders can develop what Cristina Grasseni has referred to as 'skilled vision' (see Grasseni 2004; 2007a; 2007b; 2007c). As Grasseni explains:

‘To exercise skilled vision means to belong socially in communities and networks that share aesthetic sensibilities, principles of good practice, rituals of participation, processes of apprenticeship, ideological stances and political interests’ (2007b:11).

In other words, breeders’ ways of experiencing the world and relating to different forms of life will shape – and be shaped by – their engagements in the show-world. What is more, I argue that exchanges of skill and knowledge are not limited by species divides but occur in the course of breeders’ practical encounters with other humans and dogs. However, despite these mutual relations, breeders’ engagements with dogs are difficult to relate to the familiar terms of pet-owner relations, defined as these typically are by affective closeness and the recognition of animal-personhood. The task of impartially assessing the bodies of dogs puts an onus on breeders to cultivate conceptual distance between themselves and the dogs they care for, yet, as I argue, skilled breeders learn to do so in a way which can nonetheless allow for the maintenance of a relational distance at which breeders are able to simultaneously respond to the needs of pedigree dogs and their breeds.

On the subject of interspecies relations, my thesis ties in with recent work which ‘urges a reconsideration of the productive potential of disconnection, distance, and detachment as ethical, methodological, and philosophical commitments’ (Candea et al., 2015:1). That said, while the concept of detachment informs the argument in the chapter, the use of the term ‘detachment’ does not sit entirely comfortably here. In this case, the problem with the notion of detachment as an ethical commitment is that it would suggest breeders are reacting against a prior form of engagement from which they become detached. This approach, it might be argued, reinforces the notion that the normal, default mode of intersubjective engagement in human-animal relations involves closeness, the recognition of animal personhood and so forth. In the show-world, I argue, this is not the case. Drawing on works by Dana Atwood-Harvey (2003, 2005) and Kim Crowder

(2015), I disagree in the sense that breeders and judges are involved in the perpetual calibration and maintenance of relationships which keep dogs and humans in carefully balanced affective distance. While this is not a process which necessarily involves extraction from prior close relations, it nonetheless supports Candea et al. in their attempts to problematise the notion of engagement as ‘an unquestionable social good’ (2015:1).

Examining how breeders maintain a productive distance with their dogs, this chapter considers how these relational practices shape show-world ethics of care across species lines. Informed by the work of Donna Haraway (2008), I consider how the affective distance, which characterises idealised show-world relations between humans and dogs, allows breeders to observe and respond to the needs of both dogs and breeds. In the show-world, I argue, the distance breeders cultivate between themselves and their dogs is not, as show-world critics often claim, always a wilful form of neglect. Instead, it can be a deliberate and ethical approach to the provision of what show-breeders consider to be good, responsive care.

### Good Breeders – The Virtue of Sacrifice

Like the majority of her peers in the show-world, Elinor is concerned that the pedigree dog fancy is in decline and repeatedly indicates that ‘good’ breeders of pedigree dogs are under attack from all directions. Wider societal changes in attitudes to animal rights and welfare, changes in pet-keeping practices, increased access to information via the Internet, and an ever-developing veterinary knowledge of genetic health and disease are perceived by many in this aging population of show-breeders as threats to the wellbeing of their breeds and, indeed, their hobby. Yet there is a deeper source of concern for Elinor and her peers. Much to their disappointment, the ways in which knowledge and practices have traditionally been passed down through generations of breeders are changing, and so too are the established structures of show-world social hierarchies. When we meet, Elinor, like many of her peers, spends much of her

time looking back at what she sees as 'better' times. Much of our conversation is about how the glory-days of the past might be re-visited in the present.

In spite of her anxieties about changes going on around her, Elinor is, in many ways, everything the show-world in its current form wants her to be; loyal to the traditions of the past, yet relatively open-minded about the need for a certain amount of health-testing of breeding stock. To the outsider, however, the ways in which she involves herself in her breed and cares for her dogs might appear problematic and contradictory. Elinor comes from a strongly working-class background, yet she is apparently happy to accept – even to promote – the pronounced hierarchies of a show-world which celebrates and replicates the inequalities of the British class system. Even more puzzling, perhaps, is the fact that – while Elinor and her husband, Bryn, are financially reliant on the state welfare system and often struggle to make ends meet – Elinor, ever loyal to the ideologies of the show-world, claims that she refuses to breed dogs in order to make financial profit. 'Bryn is forever telling me I need to breed from [the dogs] or get rid of them, but I'd get rid of him first,' she occasionally jokes with a slight strain in her voice. Elinor, after all, is a self-declared 'good' breeder, one who breeds pedigree dogs solely 'for the good of the breed' and never, ever, she insists, for personal gain.

If there is one thing which show-breeders all seem to agree on, it is that, as Elinor puts it, 'Good breeders don't breed for profit.' This is the fundamental difference that Elinor and her show-world peers observe between those they consider to be 'good' and 'bad' breeders; 'good' breeders breed dogs out of love and responsibility to their breeds, whereas 'bad' breeders breed dogs to make money. The binary tension, as breeders talk of it, is between care and exploitation. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that, as Sophie Day observes,

'In the UK, as in other places, we learn from a young age that love and money do not mix. Love belongs to a sphere that is threatened by association, with money acting as a conduit, a set of practices, habits,

and relationships that might contaminate all that love stands for' (2010:292).

The very suggestion that there is money to be made from breeding dogs causes notable discomfort among those who consider themselves 'good' breeders. Whenever I raise the issue, all are quick to stress that good breeding practices cause breeders to lose, rather than make, money. Veterinary bills, time off work, specialised food stuffs for puppies, and registration fees are all listed as expenses which account for significant amounts of the money made from the sale of puppies. In addition to the immediate costs associated with breeding, producing and exhibiting a well-bred show dog involves ongoing expenditure on travel, dog show entry, and accommodation costs. Thus, breeding dogs leaves many breeders in a bind: puppies can be sold for large amounts of money and – in contrast to their elite status in the dog world – today, few breeders belong to any elites outside the community. With limited funds available from other sources, many struggle to care for their many dogs and finance their hobby. As some breeders quietly admit, the income to be made from puppy sales is often the only way they can hope to fund their show-careers. Yet even in cases where breeders admit to making more money than is needed to cover expenses, all are adamant that none of the 'extra' money they make is ever spent on personal luxuries, but only ever on the care of their dogs. Spending money on the upkeep of dogs is, – to put it in Bloch and Parry's terms, a 'transformative process' in which money becomes 'a morally admissible resource which sustains the household and the community' (Bloch & Parry 1989:23). In sum, only when money is invested 'ethically' in the care of dogs and breeds does the sale of puppies become an acceptable practice (see also Laidlaw, 2014:27).

Historical sources suggest this thinking is nothing new in the show-world. According to accounts from as far back as 1890, distinctions were already being made between those 'good' breeders whose 'motives in showing were untainted by the desire to make a profit' and those 'bad' breeders said to show dogs 'for the purpose of winning the money prizes, and to enable them to sell the dogs they

breed' (Everett 1893, quoted in Ritvo 1987:102). Those in the latter category were considered "pure dealers" – unsavoury characters associated with working-class dog dealers who had previously sold dogs from inner-city taverns' (Ritvo 1987:102), while, much like today, 'good' breeders were seen as refined individuals willing to learn and adhere to the traditional practices of the show-world and prepared to spend all available money, time, and effort in the service of their dogs and breed. Tyrolean Shepherd breeder, Susan, who featured in Chapter One, speaks with pride about the long-term financial hardship she has experienced. Time and again she claims that the rusty, unreliable van she drives and the cold, run-down house she lives in are evidence of her willingness to sacrifice her personal comfort for the wellbeing of her dogs and breed. Much like Elinor and others in a similar financial situation, Susan often points out that her money problems could easily be resolved if only she were willing to breed and sell more puppies, yet just like Elinor, Susan is quick to claim that her unwillingness to do so is part of what makes her a 'good' breeder. It is this understanding of the virtue of their own practice which show-breeders like Susan and Elinor return to as to a mantra when under fire in the wake of *Pedigree Dogs Exposed* and other health scandals. Whatever their perceived flaws, show-breeders remain adamant that *they* are the good breeders, and for proof they point to the virtue of their intent and the virtuosity of their craft: show-breeders insist that, unlike those other breeders who don't show their dogs, they exploit neither their dogs' reproductive capacity nor the public's enthusiasm for their breeds. Key to being a good breeders, then, is the understanding that producing a litter is not only a risk to the health and wellbeing of a bitch. Also – and more significantly – breeding a litter poses a risk to the integrity and well-being of the wider breed, and for this reason the task must always be undertaken with the greatest of care.

### The Virtue of Skilled Practice

While economic gain suggests a breeder's failure to properly care for their breed, not every breeder who refuses to make a living from breeding dogs is considered

virtuous in terms of their practice. Profit-shy or not, some are believed to breed in ways which simply cannot produce good dogs. As experienced breeders see it, the task of acquiring the skills and knowledge which enable a breeder to breed good dogs involves many years of practical engagement, not just in the kennel, but also in the show-ring. Good dogs are neither particularly common nor easy to produce, and – in the show-world – they are akin to objects of virtu: rare, beautiful, and appealing to the specialised vision of the connoisseur. Correspondingly, breeders envisage themselves as having the cultivated qualities of a virtuoso: specialised knowledge and skill along with a connoisseur's appreciation of the breed aesthetic. It is this skill-set which enables good breeders to assess the quality of dogs that feature in their own breeding programmes and succeed in the prestigious role of dog show judge when assessing the quality of other breeders' dogs in the show-ring.

This understanding of good breeders as virtuosi of their craft informs many of the complaints that show-breeders make about the Kennel Club's *Assured Breeder Scheme*. Being a 'good' breeder, after all, has little to do with an individual's ability to keep records or manage paperwork as the *ABS* criteria require. As Elinor puts it, these are skills that 'you could learn as a secretary, not as a dog breeder.' As I argued in Chapter One, good breeders are seen as skilled cultivators of canine genetics and bloodlines, able to effectively channel the agency of nature in ways which bring about excellence in the bodies of pedigree dogs. Unsurprisingly, then, the virtuosity of good breeders is difficult to quantify. In an attempt to do so, the Kennel Club has introduced additional accolades in the *ABS*, for instance a 'Breeding Experience Accolade' which recognises breeders who have bred at least five litters,<sup>77</sup> but critics in the show-world are quick to point out that this gives no indication of the quality of dogs produced. As far as show-breeders are concerned, it counts not only how long a person has been involved in a breed, or how many litters they have bred. Just as important – if not more so – is that good

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<sup>77</sup> See Kennel Club (2014) 'Assured Breeder Accolades.'  
<http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/breeding/assured-breeder-scheme/assured-breeder-accolades/> [accessed 20/12/2014]

breeders dedicate themselves to learning as much as they can about their breeds and breeding practice from the start of their careers, an education which is then to be developed in the course of their apprenticeship in the dog showing community. In this sense, it is not only important that good breeders learn to engage in ethical forms of breeding practice. Also important is the way in which they learn. In other words, the practice of *learning about* good breeding must also be undertaken in an ethical form.

Adding to show-world concerns is the widespread anxiety that long-established practices and the knowledge held by senior breeders are undervalued and at risk of being lost. Elinor, like many others of her generation, is highly critical of 'newcomers' who allegedly rely too heavily on the Internet as a source of information when learning about their breeds. While some of the knowledge a good breeder must develop can be found in books or online, established breeders agree that the necessary skill can only be developed in the course of practical experience in the kennel and in the show-ring, i.e. in the company of dogs and – crucially – in the company of senior, experienced breeders. As Christina Grasseni points out, in a community of practice such as the show-world:

'it is not a systematic corpus of knowledge that defines and maintains a community of practitioners, but rather certain social modes of co-participation in which transmission of knowledge and reproduction of the community is embedded' (Grasseni 2004:49).

At least partially, then, engaging in traditional forms of show-world practice is about ensuring that these practices – and the knowledge to which they relate – are retained. Show-world nostalgia for an idealised past only adds to the imperative to engage in practices which offer a link to that which has gone before. Breeders who are deemed 'good' are aware that the future of the dog showing community in its traditional form relies on the retention of practical knowledge handed down through generations of breeders: a knowledge-practice which



sustains – and is sustained by – idealised relationships between novice and established breeders, relationships in which it is not only the content but also ‘the restricted or uneven flow of knowledge that makes knowledge important’ (Mair et al., 2012:4, cf Barth, 1975).

Tellingly, the early years of a career in the show-world have long been referred to as an ‘apprenticeship’ – a term which reflects both the status of the novice and the practical nature of the learning process. A good breeder who, as Elinor puts it, ‘does things properly’, will serve an apprenticeship of several years – including at least 5 years as a novice exhibitor – before breeding a litter or starting a career as a dog show judge. As one well-known judge and commentator in *Dog World* newspaper hopes:

‘By the time someone gets to this stage in their development as a dog person, they will have researched their breed thoroughly and hopefully spent as much time as possible with the breed elders who are keen to pass on their knowledge of dogs.’<sup>78</sup>

As this comment suggests, an apprenticeship in the show-world involves the development of a particular type of ethical personhood, and a particular way of engaging with the world. Novice breeders learn from time spent in the company of their senior counterparts just how canine bodies should be encountered. At the same time as they develop practical abilities to care for dogs and present them in the show-ring, they also cultivate the visual skills necessary to read and assess the bodies and pedigrees of dogs with reference to show-world ideals described in Breed Standards.

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<sup>78</sup> Brace, A. (03/07/2013) ‘Going Around: The Personal Minefield that is Judging.’ In *Dog World* [http://www.dogworld.co.uk/product.php/95699/1/the\\_personal\\_minefield\\_that\\_is\\_judging\\_by\\_andrew\\_brace](http://www.dogworld.co.uk/product.php/95699/1/the_personal_minefield_that_is_judging_by_andrew_brace) [accessed 29/06/2015].

## Judging – Maintaining the Standard

As Simon Cohn notes in his work on skilled vision in medical practice, 'discrimination is not apparent to the uninitiated apprentice, but appears to be a skill acquired over time' (2007:92). This is certainly the case in the show-world, where good breeders and judges learn in the course of their show-world apprenticeships to develop and cultivate a skilled way of looking at, seeing, and interpreting different forms and images of the canine body. In the show-world, then, looking and seeing are situated, relational practices, and good breeders learn to engage in these practices in skilled, ethical ways. Ultimately, it is their 'skilled vision' (Grasseni 2004) which informs the choices they make as judges in the show-ring and as breeders in the kennel, and which shapes the bodies of the breed's next generation. The notion that the visible qualities of a dog are the most important reinforces – and is reinforced by – the primacy of vision as a means to observe the true nature of an object. In the show-world, knowing how to look at a dog is to know how to see a certain truth, and so developing the ability to look becomes an ethical project which good breeders undertake in the service of their breeds.

Both breeding and judging are prestigious practices. When undertaken in forms that are considered virtuous in the show-world, either can lead to a rise in a person's status, a most welcome reward in the stratified and hierarchical community that is the British show-world. In practical terms, it is much easier to become a breeder than a judge, and while the vast majority of judges are also breeders, by far not all breeders will end up as show judges. A successful judging career generally offers more prestige, but the road that leads to the lofty status of Championship Show judge is a long one which begins with numerous lesser appointments at local Open shows. Since the early days of the dog fancy, newcomers to judging have been appointed by influential, senior figures in their breeds, based on the success of the newcomers' show careers or their fledgling breeding programmes. As older judges recall, further appointments have traditionally been arranged through social networks, so a judge's good standing

and connections in the upper-echelons of the show-world have long been the main means of securing judging engagements. In the 1970s, however, the Kennel Club began to regulate the judging system by introducing a series of formal criteria which an aspiring judge has to meet in order to judge at different levels of competition. Yet despite the Kennel Club's attempts to democratise the system, invitations to judge are still made at the behest of breed club committees, so they still rely on personal connections and the 'good name' of the potential judge.

These days, the regulations as to who can judge what and when are extensive and complicated.<sup>79</sup> Broadly speaking, anyone can apply to judge less than three classes at an Open show, but in order to progress to Championship Show level, a person must have been judging a breed for a minimum of seven years and must have successfully completed a number of training seminars and assessments. Only a few judges reach this level, and fewer still progress to the point where they can award Challenge Certificates<sup>80</sup> in multiple breeds, let alone judge Group or Best in Show competitions at Championship Shows. The names of individuals who make it this far are well-known in the show-world, as they comprise a large section of the 1,200 strong membership of the Kennel Club, fill prestigious seats on the committees of national breed clubs and show societies, and are among the regular contributors to the weekly canine press. In short, the most successful judging careers come with show-world fame and a wide range of other prestigious opportunities. Unsurprisingly, then, many breeders aspire to become Championship Show judges by working continually to improve their judging CVs and cultivate relationships with others who they hope will help progress their careers.

Elinor is one such breeder. When we meet in 2011, she has already spent 14 years cultivating her visual skills and slowly working her way up the judging ladder. So

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<sup>79</sup> For examples, see Kennel Club (2015) 'Code of Best Practice for Judges'

<http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/275062/guidejudges.pdf> [last accessed 13/07/2015]

<sup>80</sup> Challenge Certificates, or CCs as they are known, are the prizes awarded to the best dog and best bitch in a breed at Championship Shows. One a dog has been awarded three CCs it can be declared a Show Champion.

far, she has qualified to award Challenge Certificates in her own breed, as well as in one other breed in the Pastoral Group. When I visit her at her home, I often find her sitting at her kitchen table, surrounded by folders full of pictures, diagrams, and pages of text, seemingly studying them to develop what one commentator in *Dog World* newspaper cites as the two 'basic requirements' of a good judge: 'an in-depth knowledge of the Breed Standard and that indefinable thing known as 'an eye for a dog'. Without these two attributes, the same commentator observes, 'a judge may become competent, but they will never be revered as one of the greats of the dog world.'<sup>81</sup>

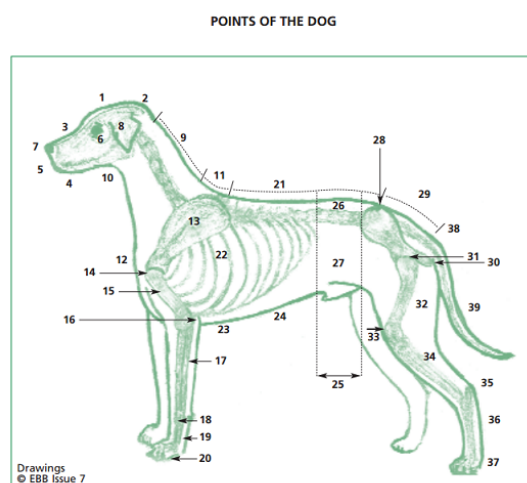
### Cultivating a Judge's Vision

Being 'one of the greats of the dog world' is Elinor's dream, one she shares with countless breeders I encounter up and down the country. Ever keen to cultivate her knowledge and social connections, she suggests that the two of us visit Alec, an experienced breed and group-level judge who, Elinor hopes, 'can teach us both a thing or two about judging.' On the way to Alec's house, I learn that he and his wife, Sylvia, are well-known in their breed and in the show-world at large. They are also among an ever-decreasing number of breeders who keep a large kennel of dogs which, at the time of our visit, is home to over 35 animals. 'A good breeder or judge should be able to recite their Breed Standard off by heart,' is the first thing Alec tells us once we have settled at his kitchen table. He gestures toward a nearby wall, covered with printed copies of the Standards for his own breed, the Boxer, and others in the Working Group, all of which Alec is qualified to judge. 'I know all of those,' he claims with pride. But, he emphasises, learning to read a Breed Standard and relate the image to the body of a particular dog is a skill in itself. 'Anyone can learn the *words* of a Standard,' Alec tells us. A Standard is, after all, merely a written description of the idealised image of a breed, much of which comprises subjective language, rather than precise measurements. Before they embark on a breeding or judging career, Alec explains, a good breeder or judge

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<sup>81</sup> Atter, S. (27/02/2015) 'Maintaining the Standard: The trials of becoming a judge.' In *Dog World*.

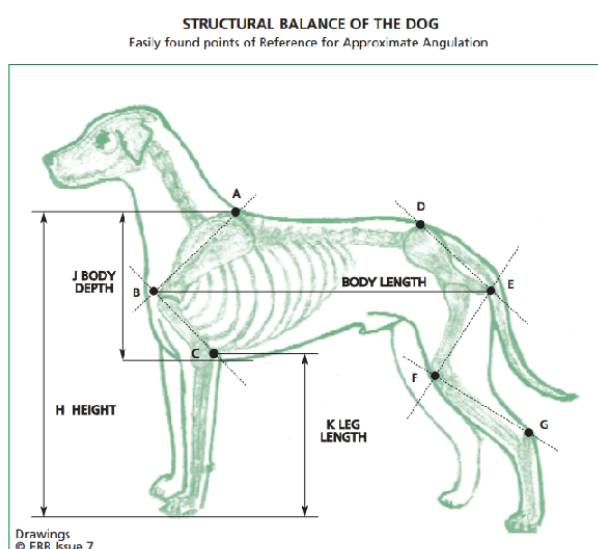
must first ‘develop their own knowledge of what the breed should look like,’ to the point where they ‘have an image of the Standard-fitting dog in [their] mind,’ to which they can refer ‘ whenever [they’re] judging dogs or thinking about breeding a litter.’ Like Elinor, Alec speaks of this process as ‘getting an eye for a breed’. Both share the understanding that the skilled vision necessary to assess the quality of a pedigree dog can only be developed in situ: there is no other way to develop this expertise other spending long periods engaged in show-world practice in the company of good dogs and skilled breeders. It is little wonder, then, that most ‘good’ breeders and judges work tirelessly to cultivate and hone their vision in informal and formal show-world settings.



|                 |   |                                       |                      |                                |
|-----------------|---|---------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. SKULL        | 9. NECK                                 | 17. FOREARM                           | 25. COUPLING         | 33. STIFLE (Joint)             |
| 2. OCCIPUT      | 10. THROAT                              | 18. WRIST (Joint)                     | 26. LOIN             | 34. SECOND THIGH               |
| 3. STOP         | 11. WITHERS                             | 19. FRONT PASTER                      | 27. FLANK            | 35. HOCK (Joint)               |
| 4. LIPS (FLEWS) | 12. FORECHEST                           | 20. FOOT (FRONT)                      | 28. PIN BONES        | 36. REAR PASTER                |
| 5. DENTITION    | 13. SHOULDER-BLADE (LENGTH AND LAYBACK) | 21. TOPLINE (WITHERS TO PINBONES)     | 29. CROUP            | 37. FOOT (REAR)                |
| 6. EYES         | 14. POINT OF SHOULDER (Joint)           | 22. RIBCAGE (SHAPE, DEPTH AND LENGTH) | 30. POINT OF BUTTOCK | 38. SET ON OF TAIL             |
| 7. NOSE         | 15. UPPER ARM (LENGTH AND RETURN)       | 23. BRISKET                           | 31. HIP (Joint)      | 39. TAIL                       |
| 8. EARS         | 16. ELBOW (Joint)                       | 24. UNDERLINE                         | 32. FIRST THIGH      | 40. MALE – CHECK FOR TESTICLES |

Figure 14: Seminar documentation provided by the Kennel Club to illustrate the ‘Points of the Dog.’<sup>82</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Kennel Club (2013) ‘Points of the Dog Assessment.’  
[http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/100939/sr12\\_training\\_board\\_-\\_points\\_of\\_the\\_dog\\_assessment.pdf](http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/100939/sr12_training_board_-_points_of_the_dog_assessment.pdf) [accessed 11/07/2015]



| FRONT ANGULATION ASSESSMENT            | REAR ANGULATION ASSESSMENT | CONVENTIONAL MEASUREMENTS  |
|--|----------------------------|--|
| 41. A. UPPERMOST TIP OF SHOULDER BLADE | 44. D. PIN BONE            | 48. H. HEIGHT = HIGH POINT AT WITHERS IN A IN VERTICAL LINE TO THE GROUND  |
| 42. B. POINT OF SHOULDER (Joint)       | 45. E. POINT OF BUTTOCK    | 49. I. BODY LENGTH = B (POINT OF SHOULDER) TO E (POINT OF BUTTOCK)         |
| 43. C. ELBOW (Joint)                   | 46. F. STIFLE (Joint)      | 50. J. BODY DEPTH (WITHERS TO BRISKET) AND K. LEG LENGTH (ELBOW TO GROUND) |
|  | 47. G. HOCK (Joint)        |  |

Figure 15: Seminar documentation provided by the Kennel Club to illustrate the 'Structural Balance of the Dog'.<sup>83</sup>

After years spent gaining practical experience in the breeding and exhibiting of pedigree dogs, Elinor and Alec both completed the Kennel Club's requisite judging seminars and exams. Here, a combination of practical and moral education is provided by the Kennel Club to ensure and certify a judge's expertise. Two generalist training seminars entitled *Points of a Dog* and *Conformation and Movement* are designed to familiarise aspiring judges with the 'structure' and

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<sup>83</sup> Kennel Club (2013) 'Points of the Dog Assessment.'  
[http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/100939/sr12\\_training\\_board\\_-\\_points\\_of\\_the\\_dog\\_assessment.pdf](http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/100939/sr12_training_board_-_points_of_the_dog_assessment.pdf) [accessed 11/07/2015]

‘conventional measurements’ of the canine body as well as the perceived relationship between specific anatomical features and the body of a dog in motion.<sup>84</sup> To help them assess a dog’s proximity to the idealised image of its breed, these seminars teach judges to conceptualise the body of a dog as an object which can be visualised as a series of disparate parts. Teaching materials and assessment papers for the *Points of the Dog* seminar, for example, require candidates to identify 40 separate points on the canine body. Show-world informants assure me that envisioning the image of a breed and the body of a dog in this way enables them to evaluate the animal’s relative merits and flaws ‘objectively’, that is, without the distraction of the dog as an individual, holistic being. This way of looking at the body of a dog, Elinor explains, enables judges to separate what is ‘good’ from what is ‘not so good’. Many dogs will be ‘good’ but for one or two features, the importance of which must be considered in terms of their significance to the original function – and fitness – of the breed. Yet again, these evaluations rely on expert knowledge of both breed histories and Breed Standards; knowledge which is of vital importance for breeders aiming to develop skilled vision in the show-world.

Alec, like his show-word peers, is of the opinion that regular study of Breed Standards – in combination with practical experience in the kennel and the show-ring – trains the vision of the beginner and sharpens the view of the expert. As he puts it, ‘You can look at a thousand dogs, but if you don’t know the Standard, you won’t know what it is you’re looking at.’ Yet detailed knowledge of a Breed Standard not only enables the onlooker to view the body of a dog as a series of parts. Once the parts of a dog have been assessed, they can once more be viewed collectively – not in the context of the dog as a holistic being, but rather as the breeder’s attempt to realise the image of the breed. I argue that it is the success or failure of this attempt that defines the course of a career in the show-ring. It is

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<sup>84</sup> Kennel Club (2013) ‘Points of the Dog Assessment.’  
[http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/100939/sr12\\_training\\_board\\_-\\_points\\_of\\_the\\_dog\\_assessment.pdf](http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/100939/sr12_training_board_-_points_of_the_dog_assessment.pdf) [accessed 11/07/2015]

a culmination of the breeder's practice and thus a visible representation of their knowledge, skill, and the quality of their engagement with their breed. In short, a breeder's attempt to realise the image of the breed in the body of a dog is a representation of the breeder's virtuosity. But without knowledge of the Breed Standard, Alec tells me, 'all you would see is a dog.' What separates the expert breeder from the casual observer, at least in Alec's view, is the former's ability to assess the breeder's efforts. In other words, skilled breeders and judges cultivate the ability to evaluate the dog's proximity to the breed's ideal image separately from their view of the dog as an embodied subject. This ability to distinguish the approximation of the image of the breed from the dog as a whole is itself considered a significant practical and moral virtue.

### Cultivating Distance

On the subject of visual practice in the context of human-animal relations, Garry Marvin observes that:

'Humans look at animals in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes, and the different ways of looking and seeing both imply and generate different relationships between them and animals' (Marvin, 2005:4).

It seems that in the context of many human-animal encounters – as Rane Willerslev suggests – 'Vision's capacity "*to have at a distance*" allows for a certain withholding or non-giving of the self' (Willerslev 2007a:24. See also Atwood-Harvey, 2003; Candea, 2010; Crowder, 2015). Alec, for example, insists he enjoys his relationships with his dogs, and watching him walk up and down the length of this kennel-block, muttering greetings to particular dogs and rubbing their faces through the fence, it is apparent that he and his dogs share relations of affection. Yet Alec is quick to distinguish his own relationships with his dogs from the type of relationships commonly found between people and 'pet' dogs. Pet owners, he insists, 'don't take dogs on their own terms. They get too close to them, but not in a way that is necessarily good for the dog.' The type of inter-subjectivity cultivated in human-pet relations, Alec argues, obscures the owner's perspective



of the animal as a dog. 'Pet owners treat dogs as humans, not as dogs,' he tells me. 'Good breeders have a bit more distance, a bit more perspective on what a dog is and what it needs – or doesn't need.' Importantly, the affective distance between breeders and their dogs allows breeders a different view not only of the needs of the dog, but also of the needs of the breed.

Again, Alec is quick to assure me that the needs of the two – and the ways in which breeders respond to dog and breed – need not be in tension. In Kim Crowder's words, the ability to 'uphold the elements of empathetic care ... [is] neither overshadowed nor cancelled out by the ... need to create distance' (2015:95). Alec argues that he is able to treat dogs with a species appropriate degree of affection, 'whatever kind of dog they are,' but the perspective his position provides allows him to simultaneously evaluate the quality of particular animals in relation to their breed. This becomes apparent as we walk the length of his kennel, stopping at the door to one of the dog-runs, where a young male dog presses the side of his face against the wire mesh. 'This is a terrible dog,' Alec tells me, as he lets the dog lick his hand and pokes his fingers through the holes in the mesh to scratch the dog behind the ear. 'Look at that terrible head,' he tells me. 'All up top, not enough down the bottom. And this is a head breed: there's no hope for him,' he says with a laugh before giving the dog a final scratch and affectionately telling him he is a 'good boy'.

What good show-breeders and judges evince, Alec argues, is an ability to engage with dogs as members of their breeds, without the particular animal detracting attention from the collective. Much more fitting, then, in this case, is Willerslev's observation that:

'distance from things is not an obstacle to seeing but its precondition [which is to say that] distance and proximity are not mutually exclusive, but rather imply one another' (Willerslev 2007a:26).

In practical terms, Alec argues, an appropriate relational distance from a dog – a distance which enables a view of the animal as a member of its breed – allows breeders to provide better care than many pet owners do, since they, as he claims, ‘expect dogs of very specialised breeds to act like ‘generic dogs’.’ What is more, the best breeders and judges are also able to impartially assess dogs-as-breed-specimens, that is without the subjective qualities of the dog hindering the observer’s ability to assess the dog’s physical proximity to the ideal laid out in its Breed Standard. Yet breeders and judges – as self-styled artisans who often draw attention to the discord between show-world and rationalist, scientific knowledge and practice – are not aiming at absolute ‘objectivity’ in the rationalist sense. In the show-world, it is widely acknowledged – indeed, celebrated – that a Breed Standard is a subjectively-written description of an ideal to be interpreted by the individual breeder or judge who will cultivate in her mind her own understanding of what this ideal actually looks like. What are of key importance here are the skills with which this interpretation is cultivated and with which the bodies of dogs are assessed.

As Alec suggests, the perspective that this distance provides allows the best judges to see both the breeder’s attempt to realise the image of the breed and the holistic being that is the dog. Thus, this perspective allows judges and breeders to make impartial decisions about the value of each dog in relation to the future development of its breed. Distance, and the form of objectivity it allows breeders to foster, are therefore not believed to preclude good care, notwithstanding the contrary claims often made by critics of the show-world. Rather, maintaining a steady, appropriate balance between relational distance and proximity is seen as part and parcel of the care which good breeders provide for both their dogs and breeds. Like other show-world forms of care, balancing relational distance and proximity involves a combination of skilled practice and moral virtue. In this case, virtuosity is to be found in skilled, emotional self-discipline, while the fact that the practice promotes ‘the good of the breed’ signals an inherent virtuousness. Cultivating this particular form of distance is thus seen as part of the ethical

commitment which good breeders and judges make to their breeds, and the ability to do so is deemed a measure of both virtuosity and virtuousness.

### Relations in the Show-Ring

In the show-ring, judges are presented with multiple dogs, occasionally as many as 250 in one day.<sup>85</sup> It is commonly agreed that the very best, most respected judges – if not always the most well-known or high-flying – are those who cultivate rapport with the dogs and exhibitors in front of them without letting these personal connections influence their judgements. In practical terms, the best judges carry out impartial assessments while still managing to take time to stroke the dog and say a few kind words before ‘going over’ its body and asking it to move around the ring. While established show-ring practice leaves room for this kind of interaction, it is by no means necessary: dogs and their exhibitors spend many hours in show-ring training classes where they learn to present the body of the dog in ways which suppress visible traces of the animal’s subjectivity – its feelings, wants, concerns and so forth. Yet although it is perhaps easier for judges to make impartial assessments about a dog’s appearance when its subjective experience has been hidden, the best judges are able to attend to it without letting it obscure their skilled vision.

I am often told by other breeders and exhibitors that Alec is one such judge. ‘He’s one of the best [Working] Group judges we have, and he’s very well respected,’ a breeder of Siberian Huskies tells me as we stand together ring-side at a show, watching Alec judge a group of young dogs. The breeder goes on to tell me that Alec is ‘what we in the show-world would call “a good dog-man”.’ The title recognises that Alec is not only able to identify excellence in the canine form, he also values the ability to interact meaningfully with the dogs themselves. What is more, Alec is widely admired for his understanding that there is much to be learned from these animals. In anthropological terms, he, like other ‘good dog-

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<sup>85</sup> Kennel Club (2015) ‘Code of Best Practice for Judges: Chapter 4.5’  
<https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/275062/guidejudges.pdf> [accessed 21/07/2015]

people', recognises that knowledge is a co-production which crosses species lines.

Alec's gentle approach to the dogs he assesses encourages many breeders to seek out opportunities to exhibit fledgling puppies in his classes to give them a positive first experience in the show-ring, while his ability to quickly put older dogs and their owners at ease makes him a favourite with exhibitors at all stages of their show-world careers. Just as importantly, Alec is seen to be an 'honest' judge who is able to successfully manage his inter-personal engagements with both dogs and humans. In short, Alec is known as a judge who doesn't let his relationships with particular breeders or exhibitors influence decisions in the show-ring. Much to the chagrin of many exhibitors, this type of professional objectivity is often found to be lacking in other judges. As a *Dog World* columnist notes in an article on 'The Personal Minefield that is Judging':

'Judges who take to the centre of the ring need to be fearless and it is the courage aspect that bypasses so many. It takes great intestinal fortitude to demote a dog with 20 Challenge Certificates to a novice-owned dog you have never seen before, but which is obviously superior, that decision being made solely on the strength of one's knowledge of the Breed Standard. Likewise, to not do well for a dog shown by someone who will be judging your own dog in a few weeks' time requires great strength of character.'<sup>86</sup>

The sort of partial judging this author rails against is often lamented as a significant problem in the show-world. Even some of the most renowned and successful judges are widely observed to favour the dogs of other well-known exhibitors. A good judge, on the other hand, will remain impartial and not allow

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<sup>86</sup> Brace, A. (03/07/2013) 'Going Around: The Personal Minefield that is Judging.' In *Dog World*.

their relationship with either breeders, exhibitors, or dogs to skew their vision or affect their judgement.

In most cases, cultivating a professional detachment from one's peers is would seem to be much more challenging for judges than the task of cultivating appropriate relationships with dogs. This dilemma is reflected in the profuse public discourse over judges' professional conduct. As another well-known breeder and judge explains in her weekly *Dog World* newspaper column:

'It takes a certain kind of person to be a good judge ... they need integrity ... it definitely isn't about swapping CCs [Challenge Certificates] with the person who is judging at the next show! Yet we've all seen it happen. We watch in amazement, at a dog that is lame ... one that is clearly an inferior specimen, is standing at the top of the line. It doesn't make sense – until we are told that the judge has a bitch sitting on two tickets<sup>87</sup> and the handler of the dog concerned is judging at a forthcoming show.'<sup>88</sup>

This is not to say that Alec and other respected judges don't enjoy close relationships with other members of the community. After all, it is through their engagements with other breeders, judges, and dogs that Alec and his peers develop the knowledge and skills necessary to be good judges. But good dog-people like Alec are able to cultivate and enjoy relationships with individual humans and dogs without these infringing on their ability to skilfully assess the bodies of dogs. Like being a good breeder, being a good judge is an ethical project both in and out of the show-ring, and good judges are not only virtuosi when it comes to the assessment of dogs, but also when it comes to the crafting of intersubjective show-world relationships. In both cases, a judge's skilfulness

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<sup>87</sup> 'Tickets' is another term breeders use to refer to Challenge Certificates.

<sup>88</sup> Atter, S. (27/02/2015) 'Maintaining the Standard: The trials of becoming a judge.' In *Dog World*.

relies on the situated ethics of certain forms of practices, which, in the show-world, are considered vital to the care of both dogs and breeds.

### Relations in the Kennel

Concerns about breeders' abilities to maintain appropriate relations with dogs extend to life in the kennel. In the interest of selecting and breeding only the best of their stock, breeders aim to develop the same skilled vision as judges, yet – unlike judges – breeders spend their lives in the company of the very same dogs they are appraising. Inevitably, many breeders develop close relationships with these animals, yet show-world discourse dictates that there be a delicate balance to be struck here. The general consensus is that those breeders who fail to cultivate and maintain relational distance from their dogs – either due to arrogance or sentimentalisation – are prone to 'kennel-blindness', that is, their vision may be obscured, leaving them unable to make impartial assessments or see the faults in their own dogs. Kennel-blindness is often seen to affect practices of breeding and care, as when it encourages breeders to breed from sub-standard dogs and thus threaten the wellbeing of their breeds. As Alec notes:

'It might be hard for some people, but to be a good breeder you need to realise: It doesn't matter how good a dog's temperament is or what a lovely pet they are, if they aren't a good example of the breed they should never be bred from.'

Alec's perspective might be dismissed by show-world critics as evidence that he is simply an uncaring show-breeder, but his own feelings on the matter – and his own pragmatic approach to relations with the dogs in his kennel – are key to his show-world reputation as a 'good dog person'. Indeed, quiet moments in the company of his own dogs prove Alec to be gentle and caring towards his dogs, yet he, along with many of his peers, remain concerned that breeders must guard against becoming overly attached to the point at which they lose perspective and compromise the virtuosity of their practice. Of primary concern is the trend

towards smaller kennels and companion relations which, show-world traditionalists claim, results in many show-dogs now being kept as 'pets'. On the other hand, some breeders – Elinor among them – argue that all dogs should be pets first and stock animals second. Yet the definition of a 'pet' is not fixed, which makes it a compelling example of Nicolas Humphrey's claim that 'we can hold multiple, even seemingly contradictory attitudes to the same animal' (1995:478, quoted in Holloway et al., 2011:535). While Elinor classes her dogs as pets whom she holds in great affection, like many others in the show-world, she has previously sold or given away dogs that haven't succeeded in the show-ring. The ability to view dogs with impartiality is seen as key in these cases to determine not only which dogs are worth breeding from but also which dogs are worthy of a place in a show-world kennel. Particularly in breeds where population numbers are low, breeders argue that moving sub-standard dogs out of the kennel and into a pet home is the responsible thing to do. Not only is rehoming deemed to be better for the dogs, which – not being show-quality – might otherwise spend much of their time confined at home. In the understanding that show-breeders are responsible for breed preservation, excluding and rehoming mediocre dogs is also thought to be in the interest of the breed. As Elinor recalls of her own experience in rehoming sub-Standard dogs:

'It's hard to let them go once you're attached to them, but we have to think of the bigger picture. [Corgis are] on the "Vulnerable Native Breeds" list – there are very few of these dogs left, so breeders like me need to make sure we do the best for the breed.'

Moving dogs to new homes might not be an easy task, but in the show-world it is seen by many as the sort of personal sacrifice that good breeders should be prepared to make 'for the good of the breed'. Indeed, the ability to make such self-abnegating decisions in the interest of one's dogs and breed is seen as a mark of significant ethical virtue. It is generally agreed that, when breeders' relationships with dogs do not cloud their view of the breed, they can respond to the needs of

both dogs and breed and thus fulfil their practical and moral duties to particular dogs as well as to the collective.

There is no doubt that dogs matter to breeders like Alec, but, as Haraway argues, the relationships between humans and particular animals are not the only place to find proof of an emotional connection:

‘Not that a particular animal does not matter, but that mattering is always inside connections that demand and enable response’ (Haraway, 2008:70).

My argument here is that, in the show-world, their connections with dogs allow breeders to see, respect, appreciate and respond to dogs in an appropriate way – that is, as members of their breeds. Some, like Elinor, seem able to maintain distance and perspective with their dogs despite living alongside them in the same house. Indeed, in her case, I am at times taken aback by her ability to demonstrate marked affection for a particular dog while telling me, for instance, that she has ‘been thinking about getting rid of this one.’ But others find Elinor’s pragmatism difficult to maintain when living in such close proximity. Alec, for example, insists that keeping dogs at a physical remove in a kennel is ‘better’ all round – for the dogs and for the breeder who, he claims, will be less likely to ‘forget they’re dogs’ and begin to treat them like children. In this sense, show world relations with dogs are – to borrow from Candea et al., – ‘not relational forms that endure and cannot be unmade,’ but rather ‘deciduous pledges whose maintenance requires daily care’ (2015:2). A final point to make here is that, as Wilkie notes, the nature of emotional involvement which humans share with animals ‘is not static and can vary as the animal’s perceived status changes and the nature of [the] relationship strengthens and weakens’ (2005:218).

Take for instance Susan, a breeder who now keeps her retired Show Champion bitch, Rosie, as a ‘house dog’, while her younger dogs live outside the house in a kennel. Rosie is no longer a show-dog or a breeding bitch. Her contributions to her breed have already been made, and in her retirement, Rosie’s status and her



relationship with Susan have changed. Susan says she no longer needs to remain 'objective' when it comes to thinking about Rosie, who is no longer a show dog but simply a companion. In short, their relationship is no longer shaped by the responsibility Susan holds toward Rosie's breed. As Kim Crowder notes, animal husbandry 'involves emotional versatility' (2015:85). In the show-world, this versatility must be carefully cultivated, and spending one's life caring for pedigree dogs and their breeds involves a careful balancing of instrumental and affective attitudes. In the kennel as in the show-ring, good breeders depend on both virtuosity in their practices and virtuousness in their intention to cultivate the necessary perspectives to provide a high standard of care to their dogs as members of breed collectives.

## Conclusion

Representatives of the Kennel Club are arguably naive to claim that, before official criteria were laid down in the *Assured Breeder Scheme*, 'no one knew what was good or bad breeding.'<sup>89</sup> Most show-breeders, much like Elinor and Alec, hold very strong opinions about what counts as good breeding and who counts as a good breeder. What is more, the criteria by which they and their fellow show-breeders measure 'goodness' has little to do with the concerns over animal husbandry, record keeping, and communication with puppy-buyers, which are the focus of the *Assured Breeder Scheme*. As show-breeders see it, these criteria do not account for the practical knowledge and expertise valued in the show-world; criteria which, it is understood, 'good' breeders need to fulfil if they are to ensure the wellbeing of pedigree dogs, breeding programmes, and – crucially – their breeds. In the show-world, good breeders are those who work hard to carefully balance the individual and collective good of both humans and dogs through skilled practices, something which the *ABS* fails to take into account. In practical terms, the scheme does not recognise the fact that breeding for money

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<sup>89</sup> Lambert, B., quoted in *Dog World* (05/08/2011) 'ABS: New Name and New Goals.' [emphasis added]

is a practice widely criticised for exploiting both dogs and their breeds. Nor do the *ABS* criteria take account of the specialist vision and in-depth knowledge which ‘good’ breeders develop in the course of their careers – both of which, as show-breeders understand, can only be developed through sustained practical engagement in both the kennel and the show-ring, and in the company of other good breeders and good dogs.

Yet the divergent criteria with which the *ABS* and the show-world community determine who counts as a good or bad breeder are not the only perceived problem with the scheme. The *ABS* pays little heed to the traditional social structures of the show-world, which, since the earliest days of the dog fancy, have distinguished between novice and experienced breeders, and marked out the latter as virtuosos. Arguably, then, the main problem with the *Assured Breeders Scheme* is that it democratises access to the title of ‘good breeder’, making it available to breeders outside the show-world and even to those who fail to follow the traditional breeding practices or paths to status. *ABS* concepts of good animal husbandry and formalised puppy-sales procedures are, after all, not seen as a particularly important practices of care for a breed: not only are these considered menial tasks, they are also focused solely on individual, rather than collective, wellbeing. The view from the show-world is succinctly summed up by one breeder who argues in *Dog World* newspaper that the main focus of the scheme is ‘paperwork, method and environment’. The problem, this breeder insists, is that ‘None of these factors will guarantee a litter which is full of breed type, soundness and quality.’<sup>90</sup> As I hope to have clarified in Chapter One, ‘type, soundness, and quality’ are physical as well as moral qualities; they signal both the virtue and virtue of well-bred pedigree dogs. And as I have argued in this chapter, they also signal the virtuosity and virtuousness of the dogs’ breeders.

After all, being a good breeder is about engaging in specific practices which simultaneously care for dogs and for breeds. As it is understood in the show-

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<sup>90</sup> Osborne, G. quoted in *Dog World* (03/01/2014) ‘ABS members unhappy with fee increases.’

world, the wellbeing of both hinges on breeders' abilities to recognise and care for the idealised image of the breed by attempting to realise this image in the bodies of their dogs. But to realise said image, breeders must first engage in ethically acceptable forms of practice through which they can develop an in-depth, situated knowledge of their breeds. My argument in this chapter has been that the show-world is not built around an aggregate of abstract knowledge, but rather exists as a multiplicity of relational practices through which knowledge is transmitted and reproduced. Breeding pedigree dogs involves the ongoing cultivation of multiple forms: breeders cultivate their dogs and breeds at the same time as they cultivate themselves as skilled, knowledgeable breeders and judges. In part, then, the pedigree project is about ethical self-making, in which good breeders develop both virtue and virtuosity in the course of their practice, ultimately allowing them to improve the care they provide to both dogs and breeds.

As virtuosos of their practice, one of the most important attributes a good breeder or judge must develop is skilled, expert vision which will allow them to evaluate the bodies of dogs with reference to the image described in their Breed Standard. This virtuosity is made evident in the abilities of skilled breeders and judges to identify and reproduce historically accurate images of their breeds in the bodies of their dogs. In practical terms, this not only requires a thorough knowledge of the Breed Standard, but also the ability to maintain a certain distance in the relations they share with dogs. To gain these skills, breeders and judges receive tutelage from experienced colleagues and are encouraged from all sides to view the canine body as a series of independent parts, rather than simply as a biological whole. At the same time as it hones their vision, their training also equips breeders with an impartial perspective. In short, learning to look at a dog in the tradition of the show-ring means learning to see the image of the Breed Standard as it has been realised in the body of the dog, not look at the dog as a holistic being.

Failure to view dogs at a distance is widely believed to lead to bad judgements which – given the general consensus that show-winners make the best breeding stock – has severe implications for the wellbeing of the breed, as well as for the future of a judge's career. Likewise, a breeder's failure to cultivate this sort of distanced perspective in the kennel leads to occluded vision and, ultimately, to kennel blindness which again leads to 'bad' breeding decisions and threatens not only the status of breeders but also the wellbeing of dogs and their breeds. Yet such general principles notwithstanding, it is seen as a given that the best breeders do not need to detach themselves from their dogs. Rather, they work hard to develop a detailed, relational knowledge of their dogs while retaining the ability to separate this knowledge from the relationships in which it has developed.

The key point here is that, in the view of show-world traditionalists, the type of affective intimacy which characterises relations between pet dogs and their owners is deemed to be based on a misreading of what a dog is, and what it needs to live a happy and fulfilling life. From this perspective, typical relations between humans and their pets not only stifle the subjectivity of the animal, but also obscure the view of the owner. This is not to deny the affective qualities of breeders' relationships with their dogs, but rather to suggest that inter-subjectivity takes many forms. As Candea (2010) argues, in order to appreciate the complexity of relations between animals and those who care for them, scholars need to 'make some space within the concept of "relationship".' Doing so we can acknowledge that the possibilities of human-animal relations are far more nuanced than the extreme positions of complete lack of engagement and the (often sentimentalised) inter-subjective connections of companion species relations (see Candea, 2010:244). What breeders learn in their apprenticeships in the show-world is the capacity to perceive their dogs as members of their breed. Importantly, this perception enables breeders to respond and relate to dogs as breed members. As Haraway argues, response 'grows with the capacity to respond, that is, responsibility' (2008:71). When it comes to connections between breeder and breed, pedigree dogs matter in the show-world much more

than do other forms of life. Thus, a good breeder's recognition of a pedigree dog's 'mattering', to use Haraway's term, comes with new responsibilities as well as new capacities for situated, breed-specific forms of care.

## Appendix

| Characteristic  | Backyard Breeder  | Puppy Farmer  | Commercial Breeder   | Hobby Breeder   | Reputable Experienced Breeder   |
|---|---|---|--|---|---|
| Has a specific breeding goal  | To produce puppies  | To make money   | To supply the demand   | To better the breed   | To perfect a specific type to leave a legacy.   |
| Belongs to and works with breed club  | May masquerade as a member  | Hardly ever   | Has a network of business contacts                                       | Extremely dedicated   | Very active, generally an officer   |
| Has at least one mentor   | Works independently, lacks guidance                                     | Not interested in breed improvement                                       | Does not specialize in specific breed                                    | Invites knowledge   | Is a mentor, writes books/articles, conducts seminars   |
| Understands and breeds to the standard  | May not even know what it is.   | Uses any available stock.   | Focuses on general appearance  | Strives towards the ideal   | Often helps to define it.   |
| Active in dog related activities (shows, trials, rescues)   | Often rescues only to attain more stock. Rarely attends shows or trials | Does not need to promote establishment; sells to brokers--pet shops, etc. | Does not need to promote establishment, sells to brokers, pet shops etc. | Shows and trials to prove worth<br>Shows & trials to objectively test breeding stock. | Often judges, provides seminars, writes articles, and willingly mentors serious Hobby Breeders. |
| Knows the true history of the breed   | May share false/incomplete info   | Often pretends to know some.  | Claims that it's not important.  | Studies continuously  | Impacts the breed for many decades  |
| Sells pets with spay/neuter contract and tries to stay in touch with new owners                     | May charge more for "breeding" papers                                   | Often issues papers via generic "registries"                              | All pups sold have full breeding rights.                                 | Yes, and diligently follows up on progeny   | Always differentiates breed/pet quality and insists on frequent updates                         |
| Keeps up with health and temperament issues affecting the breeding and provides in depth guarantees | May refuse to acknowledge most problems. Considers shows and            | No need to, mostly supplies brokers and pet shops                         | Meets minimum standards as required by state law.                        | Goes above and beyond standard requirement  | Maintains a solid support system -- accepts full responsibility for every                       |

|  |  |   |   |   |  |
|--|--|---|---|---|--|
|  | trials as too "political".                                 |   |   |   | puppy produced   |
| <b>All breeding stock is tested for genetic diseases affecting the particular breed.</b> | Some occasionally may be to impress consumers.             | Only as demanded by consumers -- may give papers as proof of quality. | May provide undocumented paperwork for appearances sake.              | Intensive testing always a priority                 | Often initiates club sponsored seminars and clinics.                         |
| <b>Maintains carrier records on all dogs in gene pool including effected progeny.</b>    | Focuses mostly on phenotype-- unfamiliar with genotype.    | Often supplies broker and pet shops, records unavailable.             | Dogs and puppies are often auctioned off in lots, records unavailable | Attempts to continuously track every puppy produced | Bases entire breeding program on extensive gene pool data.                   |
| <b>Clean, sterile environment always maintained</b>                                      | Conditions may vary greatly depending on available income. | Often tries to maintain minimum standards                             | Cleanest and best organized; state inspected                          | Usually "home raised with love" and well cared for. | Often cluttered but always healthy and mentally stimulating                  |
| <b>Expected longevity with any particular breed</b>                                      | Unrealistic expectations-- easily disillusioned.           | Will continue as long as the sales are coming                         | Depends on popularity of specific breeds                              | On a mission-- plans to stay for the long haul.     | Involved with the breed/ breeding for decades-- makes a lifetime commitment. |

Figure 16: 'Breeder Matrix Comparison Chart'<sup>91</sup>, colour-coded in order to distinguish categories of 'good' and 'bad' breeders.

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<sup>91</sup> This chart, sent to me by an Elinor, was originally sourced from the *Shiloh Shepherds* website: <http://www.shilohshepherds.com/puppyBreeders/breederArticle.htm> [last accessed 10/07/2015]



## Chapter Three – The Art of Breeding

‘If I had the choice, I’d mate her to her father,’ Alec tells me, pointing to the young Boxer who lies lounging on the sun-warmed concrete of her kennel-run. It is a hot Monday afternoon in late summer 2011, and Alec and his wife Sylvia are relaxed and in good spirits following a successful trip to a Championship dog show at the weekend. The bitch we are looking at – ‘Jas’, or ‘Champion Wintersnowfall’s Sweet Jasmine’<sup>92</sup>, as she is known to the show-world – came away from the show with her fourth Challenge Certificate. Aged three, Jas has already been ‘made-up’ as a Champion, and Alec and Sylvia are now considering when and to which dog she should be mated. Leaving Jas to sleep off the excitement of the past weekend, we slowly walk along the length of the kennel block, looking in on dogs made lazy and sluggish by the summer heat. In the enclosure closest to the house, Jas’s father, Archie, stands proud and alert, his nose up against the mesh. Aged nine, Archie is a prized and prolific sire: the numerous show-winners among his four-hundred-plus offspring have cemented his reputation as a dog who will reliably ‘throw’ puppies ‘true-to-type’. Yet while Archie may have been the first choice as a mate for his daughter, Alec explains with a weary sigh that ‘[The Kennel Club] won’t let us breed that close any more. But let me tell you,’ he insists with sudden panache, ‘these breeds wouldn’t be here today if breeders hadn’t spent centuries doing those sorts of close matings.’

In Alec and Sylvia’s kennel, matings between first- or second-degree relatives have been standard practice for most of the couple’s breeding career – over 50 years. As of 2011, they have reached their 18<sup>th</sup> generation of home-bred Boxer dogs. As they are proud to inform me, all the dogs we see in their kennel today are the descendants of a ‘foundation bitch’ who Alec bought in the early 1960s. ‘I haven’t bought another bitch since. They all go back to her.’ Alec’s breeding philosophy has paid off in terms of show-ring success. As he tells me, ‘We are one of the top kennels in this breed. We’ve bred over 50 Champions, and our stock is

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<sup>92</sup> A pseudonym



shown in countries all over the world.’ Moreover, he is keen to stress that his dogs have ‘sound temperaments, and they reach a good age.’ Like Alec, Sylvia argues that much of their success has been due to their strict policy of close inbreeding. This point is of the utmost importance to her. ‘Close inbreeding is how you set good breed-type.’ Alec nods in agreement, then declaims that he learnt this lesson early in his show-world career in an apprenticeship served under ‘one of the doyennes of the breed’, as he refers to her, a lady called Mrs Percy. Alec recalls how she advised him to ‘mate my top dog to all the bitches I had, and then to mate the same dog to all his daughters.’ Just how sound Mrs Percy’s advice was is evident to Alec when he looks at his dogs. ‘You can look at pictures of my dogs from 40 years ago and they look identical to the ones outside the house today. That is what you call ‘good type’.’

Like the majority of their show-world peers, Alec and Sylvia are heavily invested in ideologies of purity, genetic insularity, and continuity. What they value most in their breeding programme is the notable continuity and the predictability which they have managed to cultivate over the course of their 50-year careers, and which they see as their responsibility to preserve. Recently, however, this continuity has been threatened by the introduction of a Kennel Club ban on matings between first-degree relatives. Today, Mrs Percy’s advice on good breeding can no longer be put into practice, leaving Alec and Sylvia concerned for the future of their breeds. As Alec explains:

‘The closest we can go now is uncle-to-niece or aunt-to-nephew. And we can still do grandfather-to-grand-daughter, of course. But there are so many people – vets and such – telling us we shouldn’t be inbreeding, or linebreeding, as we call it. Soon we won’t be able to do any close matings.’

This is a serious problem, Alec and Sylvia stress. As far as they are concerned, a move away from traditional practices means the end of an era in dog breeding. ‘Without line-breeding, it’s impossible to set type and produce dogs that conform to the [Breed] Standard,’ Alec tells me, seemingly both saddened and angered that

'If you can't line-breed, you can't keep a breed true to form, and you may as well forget about breeding Standard-fitting dogs.'

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As the two previous chapters make clear, the pedigree dog showing community has long considered 'well-bred' dogs to be objects of virtue; that is, objects of rare beauty which appeal to those of refined, educated taste. The ability to appreciate the aesthetic beauty of a Standard-fitting dog distinguishes dog show judges as skilled connoisseurs. Likewise, the ability to produce a 'good' dog denotes the expert craftsmanship of the skilled breeder. In the show-world, this connoisseurship and craftsmanship also signal moral virtue, as both qualities indicate a commitment to knowing and preserving pedigree dogs in their Standard-fitting form. Those who engage in traditional forms of show-world practice are considered responsible breeders in that they take seriously and respond to the needs of both pedigree dogs and their breeds. While the 'best' breeders are those who have spent a long time studying the skills necessary to produce and appreciate pedigree dogs in their ideal form, a commitment to this ideal is enough to place novices and less experienced people in the category of 'good breeder'. As Alex explains, good breeding 'has always been about trying to promote good characteristics and eliminate bad characteristics and poor features,' and these efforts apply to both the product and practice of breeding: dogs and their breeds can be improved through skilled and careful breeding, and breeders can cultivate and improve themselves through their involvement in skilled and careful practice.

However, while many breeders, including Alec and Sylvia, remain loyal to the ideological and practical traditions of the dog breeding community, the consensus as to what constitutes good breeding is shifting. A growing concern among vets, members of the public, and even some pedigree dog breeders came to the fore with the 2008 broadcast of the BBC's *Pedigree Dogs Exposed* which alleged that the traditional show-world practice of inbreeding leads to significant

levels of disease and suffering in pedigree dogs. Much to the public's dismay, the programme also suggested that some breeders routinely cull puppies who do not fit with the images described in their Breed Standards. Quick to realise that change was now inevitable, the Kennel Club's management – who were themselves heavily criticised in the documentary – began working alongside veterinary scientists and advisors to improve pedigree dog health as seen from a veterinary perspective. As Holloway et al. (2011) note with regard to commercial livestock breeding, in the show-world, 'genetic knowledge practices are becoming increasingly important.' The practices, 'represent a distinctive way of knowing and evaluating the bodies of livestock animals, and are transforming the way selection and deselection are carried out' (Holloway et al., 2011:535). However much show-breeders might resist these changes, the Kennel Club has warned breeders that regulation, and legislation to enforce it, will come. True to the show-world preference for 'keeping things in the family', the organisation strongly suggests that it is in breeders' own best interest that change comes from within the show-breeding community, rather than from the British Government. The fact that not all breeders agree with new Kennel Club directives shores up Elana Buch's argument that new care practices engendered by social and political change are 'an increasingly important site for understanding emerging forms of governance' (2015:278/9). In part, this chapter will continue a discussion about show-world governance and how changing relationships between breeders and the Kennel Club are shaping what counts as good practice in the care of dogs and breeds.

There can be no doubt that some breeders in the show community are pleased by the Kennel Club's increased attention to health and the fact that problems have been brought to light. A 'progressive' minority of breeders, much like those who feature in Donna Haraway's (2008) work on dog breeding, have long been calling for increased action on health, and many remain adamant that – even post-*Pedigree Dogs Exposed* – the Kennel Club are not doing enough to bring about change. Meanwhile, many show-world traditionalists are outraged at the programme makers, the veterinary profession, the general public, and even their

own Kennel Club for what they see as unfair criticism. Of course, they concede, there are significant health problems in many pedigree dogs. After all, the public are continually buying puppies from back-yard breeders and puppy farmers who, show-breeders insist, care little about the wellbeing of their dogs or about the need to follow Breed Standards. As Alec explains, 'Half the dogs out there these days don't look anything like their Breed Standard – of course they're not going to be in good health.' Like many of his peers, Alec is adamant that carefully bred dogs – those bred by skilled, responsible breeders educated in the traditional practices of the show-world – are far healthier than dogs bred by breeders outside the community. Accordingly, he is convinced that the major changes in breeding practices that critics advocate will be detrimental to the wellbeing of all breeds.

This chapter will examine show-world breeding practices from the perspective of care and responsibility. Picking up on Haraway's work (2008), I will approach responsibility not only in terms of moral duty, but also in terms of breeders' *abilities to respond* to the perceived needs of pedigree dogs *as members of breeds*. Responsibility, in both senses, develops in the context of relationships; in Haraway's terms, 'mattering is always inside connections which demand and enable response' (2008:70). While show-world discourse may focus on particular beings as objects of ethical concern, I argue that what emerges in practice is a focus on the relationships in which dogs and their breeds take on ethical significance. My argument in this chapter is that breeders' dual relationships with their dogs and breeds produce different forms of responsibility – and abilities to respond – than those which tend to emerge from relationships between humans and individual pet dogs. Again, my argument links back to the larger issue of 'ordinary language' – in this case, the use of the phrase 'responsible breeding' – meaning different things to show-breeders and their critics. In the case of the show-world, I argue that responsibility in its relational forms manifests itself in the need to engage in breeding practices which promote the wellbeing of both dogs and breeds.

With this dual responsibility in mind, I examine the practices that show-breeders have long employed in the cultivation and preservation of Champion stock; practices which experienced breeders like Alec view as highly skilled, virtuous, and responsive to the needs of both dogs and breeds. I will consider how show-breeders as well as their dogs and breeds are affected by recent shifts in the ethical status of traditional practices, shifts which have led to the introduction of Kennel Club regulations which impose conflicting definitions of what counts as good care. With reference to Mol et al. (2010), I will examine the tensions between the responsive nature of care and attempts at regulation, most notably in the case of inbreeding closely related animals and the culling of non-Standard-fitting puppies, both of which many experienced, influential breeders maintain are integral to the production and preservation of pedigree dogs in the image of their breeds.

When it comes to the question of responsibility for show-world breeding practices, I argue that the perceived agency of nature gains yet more significance. As James Laidlaw (2010) observes, the attribution of agency is closely linked to the attribution of responsibility in that whether beings or things are seen as mediators of their own agency – or as intermediaries who pass on the agency of others – determines whether or not these beings or things are perceived to be responsible for bringing about change. The fact that breeders see themselves as agents who channel their agency through the dogs' genes and/or bloodlines to bring about change in the animals' bodies means that breeders themselves can claim responsibility for their efforts to produce goodness in their dogs. However, I argue, the fact that breeders do not see themselves as the lone mediators of agency is highly significant. As an alternate source of agency, nature is also seen as a bearer of responsibility, particularly in the case of unexpected change in the bodies of pedigree dogs. According to show-world rationale, the skill of selective breeding is found in the breeders' ability to subdue nature – to counter its power and agency and skilfully channel the influence nature has on the canine body. Yet it is widely accepted that even the most skilled breeders will at times struggle to anticipate the actions of nature, and inevitably physical anomalies for which the

breeder cannot be held accountable will occasionally appear when nature goes awry.

Underlying this chapter – and, indeed, this thesis – is the question of how the temporal anteriority of the show-world and the orientation towards an idealised past increase the distance between dogs and breeders. As I hope to clarify in the following pages, temporal distance is significant in the show-world, as breeders not only look across species lines, but also from object to image and from now to ‘back then’. In part, my interest here is in how show-world temporality relates to interspecies relations, particularly how breeders’ engagements with successive generations of dogs reinforces their sense of the transience of current dogs. Furthermore, I will consider two definitive aspects of this attitude: one, the maintenance of affective distance between breeders and dogs, and two, the deep belief in the virtue of breeders’ long-term commitments to their breeds. Engaging with scholarly works on selective breeding (Cassidy, 2002, 2009; Haraway, 2008; Hurn, 2008a, 2008b; Holloway et al., 2011, Morris & Holloway, 2014), conservation (Desmond, 1999; Srinivasan, 2014; Biermann & Mansfield, 2014), and animal welfare (Reed, 2015; Crowder, 2015), I build on the work of Hans Harbers (2010) and John Law (2010) to reframe the common argument that the wellbeing of individual animals and the preservation of breeds or kinds are necessarily in tension. Fundamental to this chapter – and to the thesis at large – is the argument that breeders are not attempting to care for dogs as individuals. Rather, in the show-world dogs are always viewed as members of breeds, and good care for one – be it dog or breed – is by its very nature good care for both.

### Rules and Regulations

For most of the history of the British Pedigree dog-fancy, the Kennel Club has taken a back-seat when it comes to the regulation of breeding practices. The club’s main functions have been licencing dog shows and registering new stock. Aside from the fact that individual breeders can only register the offspring of purebred, registered dogs of the same breed, breeders have long held sovereignty in their kennels. In other words, for most the history of the pedigree dog fancy,

breeders have been free to decide which stock shall be bred from and how this should be done. Yet in recent years – particularly since the 2008 broadcast of *Pedigree Dogs Exposed* – the Kennel Club has been introducing new regulatory practices which promote understandings of canine health and care different from those held by many breeders. These days, the greatest worry of many in the show-world is that the Kennel Club – or at least, the club’s management – has shifted its priorities. The traditional emphasis on the importance of physical uniformity and proximity to Breed Standards as indicators of health is being replaced with a new focus on genetic diversity and veterinary health standards, particularly since 2011, when a Professor of Veterinary Medicine was installed as the Kennel Club’s Chairman. Most recently, the organization has introduced a series of new breeding regulations which limit matings between closely related dogs. What is more, they have placed limits on the age at which bitches can be bred from, the number of litters a bitch can produce in a lifetime, and the number of times a bitch can undergo a Caesarean section. These new initiatives constitute not only a shift away from established breeding practice, but in many cases a complete about-turn. Rather than openly encouraging traditional practices as they have previously done, the Kennel Club is now actively intervening to prevent their continued use.

While the public face of the Kennel Club has changed, much of its membership, and much of the show-world at large, remains committed to traditional values and practices which the Kennel Club had implicitly and explicitly criticised in the course of introducing new initiatives. Events in recent years have left many breeders angry, not only about the imposition of unnecessary constraints on their own practice, but also about what they believe to be a marked lack of constraints affecting the practices of ‘bad’ breeders outside the show-world, breeders deemed irresponsible in that they ignore the needs of their breeds along with those of their dogs. Many show-breeders insist that tighter controls are needed for commercial breeders and puppy farmers, while ‘good’ show-breeders ought to be allowed to continue their practice unhindered by regulatory interference. Inevitably, the Kennel Club has become the target of profound criticism from

multiple sources, both in and beyond the show-world. Among show-breeders, the organisation is seen to have failed in its own responsibilities and 'let good breeders down': firstly, by failing to effectively fight their corner in the wake of the *Pedigree Dogs Exposed* documentary, and secondly, by failing to tackle the problem of puppy farmers who, show-breeders insist, are giving 'good' breeders like them a bad name.

The ongoing problem of puppy farming is repeatedly presented by show-breeders as evidence of a general lack of awareness, not only on the part of the Kennel Club, but also on that of the British Government and the general public, who are likewise criticised by show-breeders for not understanding the 'real' problems in dog breeding. The previous Labour Government, many claim, were 'too weak' to stand up to pressure from Europe over animal welfare. Consequently, the view is that dog breeding is now suffering due to the imposition of unnecessary regulations. The two weekly show-world newspapers offer persistent and critical coverage of the issue, both presenting the view that the British Government remains unsympathetic towards show-breeders and that the EU is in the hands of animal rights activists who will gladly put an end to dog breeding if given the chance. The threat from outside is such, one well-known breeder and judge suggests in a newspaper column, that those in the show-world must lay internal squabbles to rest. As he warns:

'At some point, different [show-world] factions are going to have to find common ground so that we can form a united front to ward off those who have no regard for the world of show dogs and whose sole aim it is to accomplish its demise.'<sup>93</sup>

As Rebecca Cassidy finds in Newmarket's horse-racing community, show-breeders' criticisms of outsiders' inability to comprehend the problems faced within are 'indicative of a more general attitude towards outsiders'. Like Cassidy's racehorse-breeders, dog show-breeders view themselves as 'an

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<sup>93</sup> Mallard, S. (27/07/2012) 'The Bigger Picture: The Infighting Needs to Stop.' In *Dog World*. P.15



exclusive [...] highly specialised minority', a mentality which promotes 'peripherality as a self-image' (Cassidy, 2002:46). So while show-breeders complain loudly about the lack of regulation imposed on breeders outside the show-world, regulations which affect 'good' breeders like themselves – whether imposed by the Kennel Club or external governing agencies – are perceived as unnecessary interference. The bottom line for many show-breeders is that 'good' breeders should be, as Alec suggests, 'left alone to get on with it'. Unfortunately for those who hold this opinion, intervention from outside grows ever more forceful, particularly when rooted in the sort of scientific, veterinary knowledge which show-breeders often find the most difficult to argue against.

In short, the moral and practical concerns publically professed by the Kennel Club do not necessarily reflect the concerns and convictions of many of the organisation's 1,200 members, or the show-community at large. Few are convinced by the organisation's new-found mission to preserve and promote canine life through a focus on increased genetic diversity. Far more express concern that increased diversity poses a threat to their breeds. Established breeders – Alec and Sylvia among them – feel let down by an institution they have long supported both ideologically and financially. Adding to their frustration, Alec and Sylvia are confused by what are, at times, mixed signals: while the Kennel Club is busy promoting new online tools to help breeders calculate and increase genetic diversity, senior members of staff are publically advising breeders that traditional inbreeding strategies are still in favour – among them the Kennel Club's Health and Breeder Services Manager, who tells an audience of dog breeders at a health seminar in March 2012:

'There is absolutely nothing wrong with line breeding and close breeding *if* you know those animals very, very well ... Good breeders like to line breed *because* they know the animals and their pedigrees well.'<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Lambert, B. (24/3/12) Speaking at a Dog Breeding Seminar in Inverness.

In this case, the message is clear: in the hands of responsible breeders, traditional practices such as inbreeding serve the best interests of both pedigree dogs and their breeds. According to this rationale, personal knowledge of an animal trumps scientifically-derived information about its genetics. And it is not only the advice offered by different players in the Kennel Club which often seems contradictory. Despite the organisation's official line on inbreeding, in practice the club remains firmly committed to supporting and promoting dog shows at which pedigreed animals from closed gene-pools are celebrated for their close physical proximity to the ideals described in Breed Standards. As Alec and many other breeders insist, inbreeding is the only realistic means of remaining true to this ideal.

### The Art of Skilled Breeding

As the words of the above-mentioned Kennel Club staffer suggest, inbreeding to produce Standard-fitting dogs requires substantial knowledge of breeds, dogs, and pedigrees, as well as substantial artistry and skill. As I argued in Chapter Two, their ability to produce and appreciate the bodies of dogs as works of artistic merit marks breeders out as virtuosos of their practice. Importantly, virtuosity – the cultivated appreciation of excellence – is not just an embodiment of skill; in the show-world, virtuosity is also an ethical virtue. Unsurprisingly, the assertion that 'breeding is an art, not a science' is often used by virtuoso breeders to counter rival claims to moral authority made on the basis of scientific knowledge, whether such claims are made by scientists, vets, or other breeders. Alec, for one, is fond of reminding me that:

'If you want to breed really good dogs, you have to know much more than a scientist can tell you. And it's not something you can learn by reading books. It's a skill you have to learn as you go along.'

The clear message is that, since breeding dogs is an art, scientists cannot be the experts. In framing their practice as an art – and themselves as artisans – breeders like Alec not only write-off scientific involvement in show-world practice as out of place and irrelevant. They also re-assert both their own

expertise and the virtue of their commitment to their practice. Show world-ethics, then, support recent anthropological arguments that virtue is to be found in certain forms of engagement in practice (Lambek, 2010; Laidlaw, 2010, 2014; Fassin, 2014); in this case, through a particular model of virtue based on specific artistic forms of engagement. What underlies this view is the fundamental belief among breeders that art and science – i.e. dog breeding and veterinary practice – are grounded in different and conflicting notions of what is ‘good’. While scientific and veterinary practices are seen to reference a particular notion of ‘goodness’ based on bio-scientific understandings of ‘health’, breeders insist that their own understandings of what is ‘good’ are much more holistic and relational, based as they are on practical engagements with dogs as members of their breeds.

As with many aspects of the show-world’s moral discourse, temporality is a pronounced theme in the widespread and ongoing discussions about the virtue of artistic, as opposed to scientific, practice. Publically, high-profile breeders writing in the UK’s two weekly show-world newspapers devote countless column inches to reminiscences of the ‘good old days’, when novice breeders learned from their elders who, as one commentator observes:

‘may not have been experts when it came to scientific analysis of the various breeds but ... understood breed type, balance, sound movement and breed character completely.’<sup>95</sup>

These recollections indicate a widespread nostalgia among show-world traditionalists for a pre-1980s Britain in which it was easier to live a virtuous life in terms of show-world morality. Long-standing breeders often look back at what they see as the hey-day of the British show-scene; a time when they were untroubled by ethical concerns stemming from practices and epistemologies external to the community, namely those of veterinary science and the animal rights movement. But times have changed and, in post-millennial Britain, traditionalists mournfully observe that newcomers to the pedigree dog-fancy are

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<sup>95</sup> Brace, A. (01/02/2013) ‘Going Around: the Value of Mentoring’. In *Dog World*. P.10

encouraged by the new, scientifically-informed management regime at the Kennel Club to prioritise genetic diversity and reject the extremes of breed type. These new forms of knowledge and sources of authority leave breeders like Alec and Sylvia with grave concerns about the future of their breeds. These concerns are often voiced when championing the practical, situated knowledge of breeding handed down from one generation of breeders to the next, and which they fear may soon be lost. As Alec observes:

‘Breeding dogs, you get to know about dogs in ways that vets or scientists don’t. You get to know things that you can’t measure ... A lot of it is intuitive. It makes it hard to assert yourself as an expert because you can’t always put it into words; you can’t show it in ways that a scientist or a vet would recognise .... When scientists come along and study dog breeding, they only look at measureable things – inbreeding levels and what have you. But that sort of thing only gets you so far. You can’t breed dogs by numbers, not if you want to do well by the breed.’

Alec’s concerns are rooted in an understanding many breeders share: a shift in the moral status of show-world practice is occurring, if not at the grassroots level of the show-world, then certainly at an institutional level and – significantly – among the puppy-buying general public. To borrow a phrase from John Law (2010, drawing on Cussins, 1998), the moral basis on which ‘choreographies of care’ have previously been ordered is changing in light of a shifting focus on responsibility. The wellbeing of the individual has been brought to the forefront of public concern, and, as Alec and his peers have begun to realise, the show-world mandate to ‘do well by their breeds’ no longer holds the moral authority to exempt breeders from public criticism of breeding practices which are viewed by outsiders as harmful to individual dogs. Public concern – and the concern of a growing number of breeders – now focuses on the need to improve the health of dogs as individuals, and the widespread view outside the show-world is that this requires changes to established breeding practices, and to Breed Standards.

Several years prior to 2008's *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*, critics of the show-world had already identified veterinary science as the new moral and practical authority on breeding pedigree dogs. While Donna Haraway's (2008) work focuses on breeders who have actively sought ways to incorporate veterinary-scientific knowledge into their breeding programmes, in the British Show world – as in the USA – many breeders express concerns that more scientific involvement will limit choice of breeding stock, as inbreeding coefficients and DNA test results take precedence over other considerations. Riled by a discussion of the latest veterinary report on the problem of inbreeding, Pug breeder Mabel tells me that:

'If we listened to the scientists, in 20 years all that would be left would be a load of mongrels. They don't know what is important. It's all very well saying that things need to change, but do they realise that the reason that pedigree dogs exist at all is because of the very things they say we need to stop doing?'

The bottom line, as far as Mabel and many other breeders are concerned, is that high levels of inbreeding are not the problem that veterinary science perceives them to be. Rather, low levels of genetic diversity are the result of more than a century of careful craftsmanship at the hands of generations of dedicated breeders. But despite breeders' pride in their Standard-fitting dogs, animal-welfare agencies and veterinary advisors are becoming increasingly vocal in their criticism. In 2012, the British Veterinary Association's Animal Welfare Foundation, along with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (henceforth the RSPCA), produced a 'puppy contract' which the two organisations suggested should be formally introduced for use by all breeders. The advice to breeders and puppy buyers is that puppies with a co-efficient of inbreeding over 12.5% – the genetic equivalent of a grandfather to granddaughter mating – 'should be avoided'.<sup>96</sup> In the view of veterinary science,

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<sup>96</sup> BVA AWF & RSPCA (2012) 'Puppy Contract' available at <http://puppycontract.rspca.org.uk/webContent/staticImages/Microsites/PuppyContract/Downloads/PuppyContractDownload.pdf> [retrieved 7/4/2014]

producing dogs with this much genetic crossover is not responsible breeding, and puppy-buyers should avoid breeders who engage in these practices. In the show-world, the suggestion was met with scepticism, by some even with outright anger. The writer of *Dog World* newspaper's weekly 'Comment' section was deeply concerned that the move will 'cancel out a large proportion of the puppies produced by many of Britain's most distinguished breeders,' while other breeders – Alec among them – have demanded proof that reducing inbreeding coefficients is necessary before they consider changing their practices. As Alec reasons:

'They say that a high co-efficient of inbreeding is *likely* to cause problems. So they have no proof – it's all still speculation. But then we see dogs with what they tell us are high co-efficients, and they're perfectly fine. There are some lovely Irish Setters in the show-ring at the moment, and that breed has an average [inbreeding coefficient] of 14% or something like that ... [veterinary-science] tells us one thing, but our experience tells us something different.'

Alec claims that his own experience has proven to him time and again that long-standing show-world breeding practices produce Standard-fitting dogs which he believes to be in good health. This is all the proof he needs, or so he claims, to conclude that traditional practices are both technically virtuosic and morally virtuous. The difference in show-world and veterinary-scientific approaches, then, is between the epistemologically-grounded, situated ethics of the artisan and – as breeders see it – a competing ethics based on someone else's science. For although veterinary-scientific ethics are also grounded in a knowledge of the canine body, Alec and his peers dismiss these ethics as irrelevant in the context of the show-world. After all, veterinary-scientific practices are contingent on a particular way of knowing the canine body, and without the virtuosic knowledge

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A COI of 25% represents a 1 in 4 chance that the dog has of inheriting a copy of the same gene from both its sire and dam. The Kennel Club also provides a Coefficient of Inbreeding for each breed as a whole, and their advice being that breeders should only breed if the COI of the litter will be less than the average for the breed.

and skill of the experienced show-breeder, Alec and his peers argue that vets are ill-placed to pass judgement on show-world ethics and practice.

In the case of the puppy contract drafted by the British Veterinary Association (henceforth the BVA) and RSPCA, the Kennel Club suggests that the recommendations to forcefully reduce inbreeding are a step too far. Thus, it has refused to endorse the contract. The Chairman of Trustees for the BVA, Dr Hemming, writes in *Dog World* newspaper of her surprise at the Kennel Club's response. As she tells readers, 'We have spent over two years on the project to make sure we did our research and got the right experts involved.'<sup>97</sup> The editorial team at *Dog World*, however, argue that the BVA's notion of 'the right experts' is misguided and that breeders – not scientists – are the experts who should be involved in policy-making. 'Did [the BVA] really talk to Britain's most respected dog breeders?' the newspaper asks. 'It would seem unlikely,' is the publication's assessment. If senior breeders had been consulted, the puppy contract would surely not advise against inbreeding-coefficients over 12.5%. After all, 'such a recommendation ... goes against everything breeders have been taught by their peers and predecessors.'<sup>98</sup>

Sustained pressure from the BVA, RSPCA, and other agencies leaves show-breeders facing a dilemma. On the one hand, they can choose to change their practice and minimise inbreeding, thus running the risk of losing 'breed type' along with favour in the show-ring. To be clear, this could have far-reaching knock-on effects, not only on their own status and reputations, but also on the integrity of their breeds. Alternatively, breeders can continue with current practice and do their best to ignore or defy critics. To many, this is a Hobson's choice: if they want to continue breeding pedigree dogs and meet their responsibilities to breeds, they simply have no option but to continue as they

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<sup>97</sup> Dr Hemming (20/4/2013) 'Letters' in *Dog World*

<sup>98</sup> (20/4/2012) 'Comment' in *Dog World*

have done so far.<sup>99</sup> The show-world press are quick to support breeders in asserting the value of traditional practices, opting for a rhetoric which, it seems, frequently stirs-up show-world sentiment. In January 2013, for example, *Dog World* newspaper polled readers to ask, 'When choosing a stud dog, how important do you regard the coefficient of inbreeding of the resulting litter?' Of the 142 respondents, 9 agree that it is 'very important', 32 say it is 'one of several important factors', and 94 say the coefficient of inbreeding is 'not very important'.<sup>100</sup> The publication of these result is followed by an interview with a well-known breeder who is asked whether or not she feels that genetic diversity needs to be increased. Her answer is in keeping with the general tone of the feature:

'When you have learnt enough to recognise good conformation and movement and are lucky enough to have bred such dogs, you cannot really compromise upon it. Sustained external pressure to reduce coefficients of inbreeding and thus limit line-breeding will do little to help.'<sup>101</sup>

Again, received wisdom dictates that the responsibility held by good show-breeders is to respond to the needs of their dogs as members of their breeds – not to bow under external pressure or compromise with foreign notions of what counts as 'good' breeding or 'good' canine health. Importantly, a breeder's ability to respond to the needs of dogs and breeds are – as the one quoted above suggests – grounded in knowledge and practical experience (see Haraway, 2008). Those who have 'learnt enough' to recognise what is 'good' have a responsibility to ensure that future dog generations meet with this standard, but also to ensure that this sort of practical knowledge is preserved and passed down to future breeder generations.

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<sup>99</sup> Not to suggest that many were calling for an overhaul of dog showing – as discussed in other chapters, attempts to broaden the horizons of judges in the show-ring were met with much resistance.

<sup>100</sup> Simon Parsons (18/1/2013) 'In the Dog House' in *Dog World*

<sup>101</sup> Jacque and Graham Bayne talking to Simon Parsons (11/5/2012) 'Setters Feature' in *Dog World*



Yet while traditionalists tend to hold the view that inbreeding is ethically virtuous, other breeders press for a reconsideration of established practice and welcome genetic research that treats inbreeding as a disease. As examples of breeders in Haraway's work illustrate, this is not an easy stance to take. Despite his generally benign nature, for instance, Alec is the subject of show-world gossip, according to which he has on several occasions been ruthlessly dismissive of suggestions that inbreeding is a problem. He is even said to have publically humiliated more than one breeder who has questioned his practices, and this righteousness is thought to be typical of his generation of breeders – elder statesmen and women who have held sway in the show-world after being introduced to dog showing in the 1960s and 70s and who have since remained fiercely loyal to the expertise and ethics of the breeders who taught them the skills of their craft. On account of their own long-standing careers, Alec and his peers are now the dominant players in the community: after 50 years of active involvement in the show-world, Alec is not only extremely well-known and well-connected, but also considered to be among the more powerful members of the dog showing community. Again, the temporality of show-world relations and relational-practices is implicated in the formation of a situated show-world ethics which recognises carefully formed and managed relationships through which traditional practices are made ethical. In one sense, then, the power and expertise Alec and his peers hold shape the morality of particular practices. In another sense, however, the morality to which they subscribe likewise shapes the possibilities of encounter, and – via approved practices – produces a particular way of knowing and experiencing dogs and other humans.

In the show-world, dogs are composite images. Reproducing and refining these images requires an understanding of how these parts can be selected, not only from other living specimens of the breed but also from previous generations in the dog's pedigree. Jim – friend of Alec's and a breeder of Otterhounds – offers the explanation that breeding is 'like doing a Rubik's Cube'. Each time a breeder breeds a litter, he suggests, it gives her another chance to rearrange some of the squares, and another chance to move slightly closer to perfection. A lot of

breeders will never make any sort of progress and will 'just keep swapping things around,' Jim tells me. Yet while even the best breeders will never finish the puzzle, 'some of us, if we're lucky, will be 95% there.' The problem in this case, Jim explains, is that any attempt on improvement carries with it the risk of setbacks, which, he claims:

'is why inbreeding isn't only important at the start of a breeding career, when you're trying to fix type. It's just as important to stay close later on to make sure you don't lose what you've achieved.'

For breeders like Jim and Alec, then, inbreeding equates to responsible breeding. It provides a means of protecting their kennels, their personal achievements, and their breeds. In the latter case, inbreeding is often framed as necessary for breed survival – a framing which mirrors discourse surrounding long-established national and international efforts towards species conservation. Like breed conservation efforts, species conservation projects tend to present an idealised, fixed image of a particular species or breed and take a negative view of any divergence from this ideal. Change in the appearance or behaviour of the subject population is generally viewed as a turn for the worse: a failure to conserve a 'natural' yet somehow timeless ideal (see Desmond, 1999; McElwee, 2007; Suzuki, 2007; Haraway, 2008). Like wider species- and heritage-orientated conservation efforts, the practice of breeding show-dogs is characterised by what Jane C. Desmond (1999) has referred to as 'the salvage paradigm', a rationale which, she argues, 'assumes that that which is most natural is vanishing and is in need of saving, whether the object of that salvation be cultural heritage or nature itself' (Desmond 1999:254. See also Cassidy, 2002; Hurn, 2008a, 2008b; Morris & Holloway, 2014). As I discussed in Chapter One, the discourse surrounding efforts to preserve pedigree dog breeds in their 'natural' form dehistoricises 'certain people, practices, geographical regions, and their animal inhabitants' (Desmond, *Ibid.*). Like the ideal 'types' prioritised in species-conservation, Breed Standards are widely held up 'as avatars of unchanging innocence and authenticity, as origin and as ideal' (Desmond *Ibid.*). More recently, Srinivasan

(2014) and Biermann and Mansfield (2014) have joined a growing number of scholars who argue that species conservation efforts typically invoke a particular biopolitical discourse which prioritises species survival over the wellbeing of individuals. As these scholars observe, policy makers and practitioners involved in species conservation efforts generally accept the inevitability of individual losses which are 'written off' in the understanding that the survival of the collective relies on the survival of critical numbers, rather than the survival of any particular member of the population.

At first glance it might appear that tensions between show-breeders and their critics mirror tensions between animal welfare supporters – who firmly prioritise 'the life and experience of individual living creatures, their right to be treated with respect, and not to be subject to acts of human cruelty' (Reed, 2015:10) – and species conservation discourse, which prioritises the well-being of the collective even as this involves compromises to individual welfare. Yet, as I have argued in previous chapters, this is not the case. In the show-world, care practices don't respond solely to the needs of particular dogs or the needs of breeds collectives. My argument is that breeders foster relationships with dogs-as-members-of-breeds and with breeds-as-populations-of-dogs, and in the context of these relationships, the distinction between dog and breed collapses. Thus, good breeding involves strategies of care which simultaneously respond to the needs of both.

### The Limits of Inbreeding

Unlike show-world critics, breeders are quick to defend inbreeding and defend the practice against charges of undue suffering, although they do acknowledge that inbreeding carries a certain amount of risk. As they emphasise, however, inbreeding has long been carried out within a framework of supportive practices which mitigate or counter potential problems. From this perspective, it is those who work to abandon, rather than maintain, traditional practices who put the health and wellbeing of pedigree dogs at increased risk.

Skilled inbreeding, as Alec and Sylvia explain, involves a precarious, ongoing encounter with limits. The ideal, to put it in Sylvia's words, is 'to keep things as tight as possible,' that is, to inbreed as much as one can manage without increasing the likelihood of 'abnormalities', such as physical mutations or the reduced fertility associated with inbreeding depression. Inevitably, Alec observes, some breeders take things 'too far', at which point they are thought to lose their tight control of canine bodies, as 'nature' regains control and – somewhat ironically, perhaps – the process and product of inbreeding is seen to become 'unnatural'. Inbreeding, then, is an ongoing balancing act in which the most skilful breeders push things as far as possible towards the breed ideal without going beyond the tipping point at which nature regains control and the virtuous ideal quickly turns to an 'unnatural', pathological state of abnormality in the bodies of dogs. Hence, as wary and reluctant as some breeders are, occasional outcrossing is sometimes necessary, as Alec puts it, 'to bring in new blood.' Like many of his peers, Alec has been schooled in the tradition of 'two generations of inbreeding then an outcross', although he expresses significant reluctance when the time comes to look for breeding stock outwith his own kennel. As necessary as outcrossing may be, he tells me, the practice also involves substantial risks. Like extreme inbreeding, outcrossing loosens the tight control breeders have on their stock, and introducing new dogs to a breeding programme can lead to the unanticipated appearance of physical traits which deviate from the image of the Breed Standard. What is more, Sylvia warns:

'Outcrossing is when the skeletons come out ... you know what you're going to get when you inbreed, when you put two of your own dogs together ... but when you go out to someone else's line, the new combination between your dogs and theirs can throw up new problems.'

Practiced irresponsibly, outcrossing poses a threat to a standard of purity that requires breeders to do more than simply practice within the boundaries of a breed. A good bloodline is a mark of quality based on a specific, situated understanding of what a pedigree dog should be: an understanding which

extends past concepts of genetic purity. Quality bloodlines take time and effort to cultivate, and, as Sylvia puts it, 'One outcross can screw up years of careful breeding and hard work.' The results of irresponsible outcrossing are evident, Alec claims, when he looks at the dogs produced by unskilled breeders on the margins of the show-world, and especially beyond it. All too often, Alec warns, a carefully bred dog falls into the hands of an unskilled breeder who will 'breed it to any old dog in the breed,' thereby producing puppies which are 'the next best thing to mongrels.' Careless breeding is perceived to deface the image of the breed, corrupting the ideal that breeders work hard to realise and which they hold sacred. As W.J.T. Mitchell's observes, images such as the ideal breed specimen are 'transparently and immediately linked to what [they] represent. Whatever is done to the image is somehow done to what it stands for' (Mitchell. 2005:127). The view from the show-world, then, is that indiscriminate outcrossing on the part of irresponsible commercial breeders is a form of vandalism, and one which serves as a warning of what will happen if care is not taken to preserve traditional show-world values and practices. Alec and Sylvia regularly point to images of 'badly bred' dogs from alleged puppy farmers; dogs which, they argue, serve as examples of what would happen if inbreeding were discontinued. Likewise, when I ask her about outcrossing, Pug breeder Mabel claims that:

'If you outcross to unrelated dogs, you lose all breed type. And I can prove that, just look at the dogs that commercial breeders produce. It's a real problem in Pugs – go and have a look at the websites of these puppy famers and look at the pictures of their dogs. They are all different shapes and sizes. Some of them look so different they might as well be a different breed.'

In the course of their careers in the show-world, then, skilled breeders develop not only an aesthetic appreciation for a particular image of their breeds, but also for phenotypical uniformity among dogs in a kennel or a bloodline. Unlike the irregular appearance of those dogs he views as 'badly-bred', Alec claims that, 'the dogs at a top kennel where the breeder has been breeding carefully ... will all look

very similar.’ So, while the ability to realise the idealised image of a breed in the body a pedigree dog is a marked achievement, the most celebrated breeders achieve this same ideal over and over with as little variation as possible. In other words, uniformity – and the ability to ‘fix’ the image of the breed – is a triumph of careful breeding. Both the process and product of indiscriminate outcrossing, on the other hand, are the practices of breeders who lack both the technical skill and moral virtue to maintain and care for the image of their breed.

Like Alec and Sylvia, many older breeders speak of their satisfaction at having developed their own bloodline to the point where other breeders can recognise dogs of their breeding. Pug breeder Mabel often proclaims that she can ‘look at a puppy, even at a couple of weeks old, and say: “That’s one of mine.”’ Her years of dedicated breeding have paid off to the point where Mabel’s kennel is widely known for what she calls ‘lovely heads ... and beautiful, consistent type right through each litter.’ This uniformity also helps breeders when it comes to making decisions as to which puppies to keep from a litter. As Mabel explains:

‘When you outcross you get more of a mixture of type and quality in the litter, and of course it makes it harder to know what to keep from a litter. Because there is such a mixture, and because you’re not familiar with what is being produced, you don’t know how puppies are going to mature.’

Inbreeding, as other breeders agree, allows skilled breeders to predict both the outcome of a mating and the development of particular puppies with much more accuracy than does outcrossing. Contrary to the claims of scientifically informed critics, inbreeding – balanced with the occasional, responsible use of outcrossing – does not so much pose a risk to the health of individual dogs and breeds as do the opposite. According to many show-breeders, it is the surest way to *minimise* risk.

## Culling as a Practice of Care

Even with the most responsible use of outcrossing, most breeders acknowledge that problems will occasionally arise and need to be dealt with. This situation is not unique to dog breeding. As Holloway et al. note, whether the production of pedigree livestock is motivated by affect or economy, these practices necessarily involve ‘choosing some animals and discarding others’ (2011:535). In the show-world, older breeders remember how, in decades past, many of their forbearers were somewhat ruthless when it came to selecting and rearing stock. In those days, the culling of deformed or diseased puppies was standard practice for many. As a weekly columnist in *Our Dogs* newspaper muses:

‘Up to comparatively recently [...] ordinary puppies had very little value. If some breeders didn’t like a puppy, say, the colour was wrong or it had a gay tail set he could drown it without exciting anger. Apart from anything else, this would remove a dog so it could not pass on unwanted genes. However, attitudes have changed with the times and the drowning of puppies and kittens would be intolerable today: perhaps this is why unwanted genes which could cause disease are still prevalent in breeds, pedigree or otherwise.’<sup>102</sup>

‘Bucketing’ unwanted puppies was, older breeders tell me, common practice in previous decades. Puppies would be submerged in a bucket of water with a stone placed on top of them to hold them down until they drowned. Although it is now largely a thing of the past, even talk of the practice often draws a shocked response from many show-world newcomers, but as one elderly informant puts it:

‘You have to understand, [culling] didn’t used to cause a scandal like it would now. People didn’t tend to talk much about it, but that was just because that sort of conversation wasn’t in good taste, not because people would have objected.’

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<sup>102</sup> Robert Killick (27/1/2013) ‘Killick’s Column: Who’s the mad, bewhiskered chap?’ in *Our Dogs*

Again, the specific form in which breeders engage in a practice has ethical consequences. Talking about culling, it seems, is as much – if not more – of a problem than the deed itself. As many senior breeders indicate, cultivating themselves as good breeders requires a certain amount of discretion when it comes to talking about unsavoury or contentious breeding practices – an issue I will follow up in Chapter Six. Suffice it to say here that, even with the recognition that widespread culling is a thing of the past, many breeders remain reluctant to talk about the matter. Even Alec, who is forthright about most aspects of breeding, remains circumspect. Culling puppies, he remembers:

‘was never easy ... even though you knew it was the right thing to do – for the puppies and for the breed – it wasn’t something that was easy to do.’

In later years, Alec, like many other breeders, sought the help of sympathetic veterinary surgeons willing to euthanize unwanted puppies. Yet early in his show-career, he eventually admits, he culled a number of litters, not least as a favour to his wife, Sylvia, who had been a kennel hand when they first met. Working for a large show kennel, from time to time Sylvia’s duties had involved disposing of unwanted puppies. As Alec remembers:

‘The breeder she was working for was a bit of a dragon. [The breeder] would insist Sylvia cull any [mismarked puppies] herself, rather than take them to the vets, but [Sylvia] would call me and I would come round on the quiet and do it for her. It wasn’t nice, but I’d grown up on a farm, so I was used to dealing with animals. I suppose I was better at it than she would have been. I knew how to do it quickly and without a fuss.’

As does John Law’s (2010) account of veterinary cattle culling in the context of a foot and mouth outbreak, Alec’s memory of culling mismarked puppies illustrates how practices which might otherwise be considered harmful can, in some circumstances, equate to ‘good care’ (see also Harbers, 2010; Law, 2010; Holloway, et al., 2011). In effect, breeders’ culling practices were akin to those at



other times employed by vets; in either case, culling removes diseased animals from wider populations in order to prevent suffering and the spread of pathology. Yet even among show-breeders, the ethics of culling are far from clear-cut. Complicating matters is the fact that the tradition of the show-world – as in the cattle-farming industry – focuses on the animal not as an individual but as part of a collective. However, while Alec and many other show-breeders of his generation retain this view, a good number of show-breeders today do relate to their pedigree dogs as pets, meaning that the ethics of certain ways of relating to and caring for these animals are highly contested. The hesitancy with which Alec recalls his experience of culling puppies arguably indicates his awareness that culling attends to the needs of different objects of care than the individual subjects which many critics now understand pedigree dogs to be.

As Alec and other breeders of his generation argue, the loss of life is not necessarily problematic or, indeed, a bad thing. Most agree that a quick death in the earliest hours of life was kinder than an uncertain future as an unwanted puppy in 1970s Britain. Even today, Alec and many of his peers observe that non-Standard puppies are a double liability: not only do breeders face the risk that these puppies will not be wanted by ‘good’ owners and will end up in situations where care is lacking, but also – and more concerning to some – that they will be bred from and sully the image of the breed. In Alec’s view, it is kinder to end the life of an unwanted puppy quickly and before it can really start suffering. This, he feels, is good, responsible care. The point of ethical concern in Alec’s own experiences of culling is not that the puppies were killed. What is of concern to him is *how* they were killed; early and quickly is the agreed upon best practice. Alec remembers his worry that Sylvia, hesitant as she was, would not only be traumatised by the act of culling, but would also fail to care well for the puppies in the moment of death.

On the assumption that the practice is carried out responsibly, Mabel also argues that the culling of non-Standard puppies can be good care both for dogs and for

their breeds. Like many others, she speaks of her concern about the increasing numbers of non-Standard dogs appearing on breed registries. As she remembers:

‘Everyone used to cull, but we did a lot of things differently back then. It was easier, in a lot of ways, to breed the dogs you wanted. You could breed a lot more litters if you didn’t have to worry about finding pet homes for all the surplus puppies, and paying for surgeries for the ones born with problems.’

Culling, Mabel argues, was important in that it allowed for the quiet disposal of puppies – not only of those who were deformed or suffering from disease, but also of those who were simply below show-ring standard. As I argued in Chapter One, as far as traditionalists like Mabel are concerned, disease and anomaly in pedigree dogs are not the result of breeders own practices, but rather brought about by the forces of nature. In James Laidlaw’s (2010; 2014) terms, dogs and breeders are perceived to be in the type of exclusive agential relationship through which responsibility can automatically be assigned. With both breeders and nature perceived to be sources of agency which can shape the bodies of dogs, the practice of culling becomes a merciful, virtuous act – not one which breeders use to eliminate their own ‘mistakes’, but rather one which allows them to reduce the suffering which nature at times threatens to inflict on their dogs and breeds. As one celebrated *Dog World* columnist notes with some distain, wider societal attitudes towards dogs now mean that:

‘when a weakling puppy is born, it must be kept alive at all costs; political correctness has taught us that, whether human or animal, life must be preserved regardless.’<sup>103</sup>

The fear among many breeders is that the number of sub-standard puppies now surviving into adulthood makes it likely that some will go on to reproduce. This knowledge adds to a widespread concern among breeders, including Mabel, about a general decline in the quality of their breeds. What is more, an emphasis

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<sup>103</sup> Brace, A. (01/02/2013) ‘Going Around: the Value of Mentoring’. In *Dog World*. P.10

on the value of individual canine lives over the wellbeing of breeds is forcing breeders to give up their traditional 'stockman's mentality', – an attitude which, it is widely agreed, has kept many breeds in good health through previous decades. Too many kennels are producing dogs of 'pet' rather than 'show' quality, Alec insists, noting that most breeders now keep small numbers of dogs and develop close relationships with them. The consequence, he warns, is that few breeders are selecting high-quality stock for breeding. Sylvia, who shares her husband's concerns, reminisces about her early years in the show-world, when running a large kennel and breeding programme were, she remembers, the gold standard in dog breeding. As she explains:

'Back then, breeders would have 20 or 30 dogs, that wasn't unusual. Some kennels kept a lot more. Most breeders kept their dogs outside in kennels, of course, but then they didn't think of them as pets – they were stock animals, and that meant they only kept the best. Things are very different now – people keep dogs in a different way and aren't so strict when it comes to keeping up standards.'

The concern is more than aesthetic. While Sylvia's remark about 'keeping up standards', refers, in part, to the need to realise and maintain Breed Standards, it also refers to a more general need to maintain standards in breeding practice which promote the holistic health and well-being of both dogs and breeds. The two are inherently linked, Sylvia insists: the Breed Standard is a description of a breed specimen in a state of optimal fitness, and, as life in the show-world has taught her, a Standard-fitting dog is a healthy dog.

Sylvia is not alone in this belief. Many other breeders argue that recent experiences have taught them that a growing emphasis on care for the subjectivity of the individual dog, rather than on the need for impartiality governed by the authority of the Breed Standard, is not necessarily improving pedigree-dog well-being. Observing the changes in dogs, breeders, and breeding practices over the decades, the above-mentioned *Dog World* columnist claims to be:

‘firmly convinced that many of the health problems we see today are the result of puppies being reared and eventually finding their way into the gene pool that, generations ago, would not have survived and so they – and their problems – would have disappeared.’<sup>104</sup>

Breeders past, this commentator insists, were ‘great believers in the survival of the fittest’. As a consequence of their strict selection policies, he claims, ‘those dogs that were reared were essentially fit and healthy.’<sup>105</sup> As I hope to have shown in Chapters One and Two, situated breeding practices have developed alongside situated concepts of health and fitness which are grounded in epistemologies and ethics specific to the show-world. And as I will discuss in subsequent chapters, these concepts are often at odds with those of veterinary biomedicine. For Sylvia, Alec, and the other breeders mentioned in this chapter, a dog’s proximity to its Breed Standard is the primary indicator of good health and fitness: a healthy dog is one that fits its Breed Standard, and a healthy breed is one in which the population as a whole stays true to this idealised image. Allowing non-Standard puppies to survive is not only bad care in terms of the breed, but also, proponents of culling claim, bad care for the dogs themselves. A dog which does not meet the Standard is unlikely to thrive in the show-world, and in these cases some breeders insist it is much kinder – and more responsible – to cull than to prolong a life in which they cannot guarantee wellbeing and good care.

## Conclusion

This chapter reflects on the popular view from the show-world that, for much of the history of pedigree dog breeding, the practice of inbreeding has served as the epitome of good care. As far as many breeders are concerned, the practice not only produces idealised objects of virtu in the form of Standard-fitting pedigree dogs; it also supports other idealised forms, including traditional novice-mentor relationships between breeders through which knowledge of skilled practice is passed from one generation to the next. The very fact that much of the skills

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<sup>104</sup> Brace, A. (01/02/2013) ‘Going Around: the Value of Mentoring’. In *Dog World*. P.10

<sup>105</sup> Brace, A. (01/02/2013) ‘Going Around: the Value of Mentoring’. In *Dog World*. P.10

required for successful inbreeding can only be developed in the course of practical engagement with pedigree dogs and their breeds is – arguably – intrinsic to the virtuosity of the practice. Yet what counts as ‘good’ breeding practice has changed profoundly during the careers of longstanding show-breeders like Alec and Sylvia. Until these days, it was left to breeders themselves to decide how pedigree dogs should be bred and cared for. Good practice, show-world traditionalists argue, emerges from practical, relational knowledge of the subjects of care. It is in the context of these connections and practices that good breeders and good dogs come into being, and in which breeders attune their practices of care.

New breeding strategies promoted by the Kennel Club encourage different ways of relating to dogs, which, in the view of many breeders, threaten established understandings of a ‘good dog’. From these breeders’ point of view, show-world artistry and the veterinary science which now informs Kennel Club directives are firmly grounded in different and conflicting notions of what counts as ‘good’, not only in terms of canine bodies, but also in terms of the practices through which these bodies are produced and sustained. This presents a problem for those who insist that their traditional show-world practices involve carefully balanced attention to both dogs and breeds, and whose ability to provide good, responsive care relates to specific, show-world notions of what a pedigree dog should be. In short, changes in breeding practice disrupt these delicate ‘choreographies of care’ (Law, 2010) in both practical and ethical terms. As Mol et al. observe, regulation ‘threatens to take the heart out of care – and along with it not just its kindness, but also its effectiveness, its tenacity, and its strength’ (2010:7). Here, I have argued that new regulations not only take responsibility away from breeders. As breeders see it, these regulations also limit their ability to simultaneously respond to the needs of both their dogs and their breeds.

Recent studies of animal care practices highlight tensions between the care of individuals and collectives (Hurn, 2008a, 2008b; Law, 2010; Crowder, 2015). This chapter develops my argument that this is not necessarily the case in show-

world care practices. Breeders I worked with reject the suggestion that they – like, for example, Kim Crowder’s pig-farming informants – are caught in ‘perpetual osculation between detaching from the [collective] so as to nurture the individual, and separating from the individual so as to care for the [collective]’ (Crowder, 2015:92). Firstly, I argue that show-world tradition discourages breeders from relating to dogs as individuals, instead focusing their attention on pedigree dogs as members of breeds. Secondly, I argue that for show-breeders, care for pedigree dogs and care for their breed collectives are one and the same. Studies by Crowder (2015) and Candea (2013a) note how ‘oscillations’ between detachment and engagement – and between ‘instrumental and affective attitudes’ (Crowder, 2015:85) – are often necessary for those humans engaged in what we might think of as ‘harmful’ practices of care, yet here too, I argue that something different is happening in the show-world. Skilled breeders are often able to maintain a steady balancing of affective distance from and proximity to dogs, even as they carry out ‘harmful’ practices, for they believe these practices to be in the best interest of the dog-as-breed-member, as well as in the best interest of the breed. What is more, I suggest that a steady affective proximity to both dog and breed might be necessary *in order to do harm*, when that harm also equates to good care.

Returning once again to the question of affective relationships, I argue that the notion that ‘good’ breeders hold pedigree dogs and their breeds at a distance supports the show-world view that breeders and dogs are not linked through the type of close, agential relationship through which responsibility for disease can be assigned. After all, as Alec, a long-time breeder of Boxer Dogs admits during one of the last afternoons I spend at his kennel,

‘If breeders were to take it personally – I mean, take responsibility – every time a dog of theirs came down with a disease; that would be too much for most of us to bear, I would say.’

Good care in the show-world, then, is care that takes account of multiple objects and subjects – not only dogs and breeds, but also histories, practices, and

breeders themselves. As John Law has elsewhere noted, good care can be 'about responding, but not responding too much. It is about being there, about sensitivity, and yet it is also about distance' (Law, 2010:64). This chapter has examined how distance and proximity are balanced in the course of breeding practice; not merely in terms of affect, but also in terms of the careful balancing of distance and proximity in the pedigrees of breeding stock. Over all, my argument has been to suggest that the virtue and virtuosity of show-world breeding and care practices rely not only on the particular forms these practices take, but also on the relational context in which they are carried out, and on the connections which bring to the fore certain objects of concern and responsibilities of care.

## Chapter Four - Making Breeds: The Production of an Image

Late one summer afternoon in 2012, I sit holding the back legs of a Chinese Crested Dog named Effie, while her owner, Kathleen, carefully applies hair removal cream to the dog's neck and shoulders. After months of angling, I have finally been invited to Kathleen's house to assist with preparations for an upcoming Championship Show. Although I have heard plenty of gossip about depilatory practices in the breed, as I watch Kathleen at work I am nevertheless surprised; not only by the magnitude of hair removal, but also by the precision and skill on display. The key, Kathleen repeatedly insists, is to make sure that the dogs look 'natural' after the treatment. As Jane C. Desmond notes, techniques of staging the 'natural' in the form of animal or, indeed, human bodies often involve the display of 'distinctive, unique, and "essential" characteristics' (Desmond 1999:xvi). In the show-world, this is taken as an ethical imperative. However contradictory it might seem to the critical onlooker, it is every exhibitor's duty to ensure that the bodies and behaviours of their dogs present a picture which fits with their dogs' Breed Standard. In other words, the dogs' appearance must fit with what breeders, exhibitors, and judges understand to be the 'natural' image of the breed.



*Figure 17: A Breed Standard-Fitting Chinese Crested Dog.<sup>106</sup>*

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<sup>106</sup> Photo by Томасина (Own work) [CC BY-SA 4.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons.



In line with their Breed Standard, all Chinese Crested Dogs are expected to have a 'smooth hairless body, with hair on feet, head and tail only,'<sup>107</sup> but without regular treatments to remove hair, few meet this ideal. This is certainly the case with Effie who, when I arrive at the house, still has a downy coat of white hair 3-4mm long all over the untreated 'hairless' parts of her body. But, as Kathleen tells me, 'The hairless parts *must* be completely hairless for the show-ring.' Thus, hair-removal has become a regular part of Kathleen and Effie's pre-show beautification ritual.



*Figure 18: A non-Standard Chinese Crested Dog sporting hair on its legs, chest, and face.<sup>108</sup>*

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[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ACrested\\_Moletai\\_May\\_2014\\_3.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ACrested_Moletai_May_2014_3.jpg) [Retrieved 20/07/2016].

<sup>107</sup> Kennel Club (2010) 'Chinese Crested Breed Standard.'

<http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/services/public/breed/standard.aspx?id=6152> [accessed 3/10/2013].

<sup>108</sup> Photo by Frank Röhm.Franc at German Wikipedia (Own work) [Public domain], from Wikimedia Commons. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AChinese\\_Crested\\_Dog\\_-\\_hairy\\_hairless.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AChinese_Crested_Dog_-_hairy_hairless.jpg) [Retrieved 20/06/2016].

When I arrive at the house, preparations are already underway. A dog-grooming table with a collar attachment stands adjacent to a large dining-table in the centre of the kitchen, which is covered in an array of bottles and jars, cotton wool, tweezers, and other grooming implements. After some initial excitement, Effie returns to lie on her bed, neatly tucked into a corner under the stairs. 'She's used to this,' Kathleen assures me with a laugh. 'I call it our "spa day". She loves it – they all do. The other dogs get jealous when they don't get to come to shows.' Altogether, Kathleen has five Chinese Crested Dogs, each of which has its own personalised bed in one or another corner of the kitchen, each bed covered in soft moleskin-type material with the dog's name embroidered on the side. Each dog also has a range of clothing to keep it warm, although Kathleen admits that the youngest of the five is currently 'still in hand-me-downs' as she is yet to find the right clothes for him.

To give them the best chance of winning at the upcoming show, Kathleen has to make sure that both she and Effie are perfectly prepared. For Kathleen, this means setting her hair, plucking her eyebrows, and filing and painting her nails. On the day of the show she will do her make-up and present herself in a suit especially chosen to complement Effie's colouring. For Effie, show preparation also involves a manicure, which is followed by a long session of hair removal. After her nails are trimmed and filed, Effie is placed on the grooming table and secured with a collar attached to the metal arm that reaches above her. With a spatula, Kathleen then carefully applies hair removal cream to the 'hairless' parts of Effie's body. Starting with the bitch's hind legs, she carefully and methodically works her way to the front, covering one area at a time and waiting a few minutes for the hair to dissolve before removing the cream. Kathleen carefully washes the area with warm, soapy water, then dries and inspects the skin before moving on to the next area. When the time comes to remove the hair from Effie's face, a cotton bud is used to carefully apply the cream around the dog's cheeks and muzzle, and an eye-liner brush is used to apply it around her eyes. Once satisfied that all the necessary hair has been removed, Kathleen takes Effie over to the sink where she is given a warm bath and the hair that remains in the 'correct' places

is shampooed and conditioned. Overall, the process takes more than two hours, by the end of which Effie has been transformed into the image of a sleek, smooth-skinned dog as described in the Chinese Crested Dog's Breed Standard.

### The Image of the Breed

In the British dog showing community, the ideal dog has a 'good' pedigree as well as a physical appearance that fits with the image described in its Breed Standard. As I discussed in Chapter One, each of the 210-plus Breed Standards published by the Kennel Club describes the image of an ideal breed-specimen, an ideal which relates to the accepted 'original' function of said breed. The description of each breed ideal comprises a number of sections, each relating to a specific part of the respective dog: to the head and skull, eyes, ears, forequarters, hindquarters, feet, and so on. Breed Standards also note details of correct colour and type of coat, as well as a description of the correct movement – or 'gait', as it is widely known – which the dog should display when moving in the show-ring. As I argued in Chapter Three, in the view of show-world traditionalists, good breeding practices are those through which breeders are able to consistently realise the idealised image of their chosen breed in the bodies of their dogs. Engagement in these highly skilled, ethical forms of practice is considered good care in the show-world. Moreover, as long as a breeder maintains a careful relationship with dogs and their breed, even care practices which might otherwise be seen to cause harm to the individual can still be made ethical and good. However, even for the most experienced, skilled breeders, selective breeding is often not enough to ensure that the bodies of their dogs fit closely with the idealised image of their breed. This chapter examines how specific forms of behavioural and bodily modification are used to support the practice of selective breeding. Drawing on Donna Haraway's (2008) notion of 'mattering', I argue that dogs are made to count as pedigree dogs through skilled, material practices which enable the physical cultivation of breed ideals. In a very literal sense, I engage with Haraway's argument that 'Responsibility is a relationship crafted in intra-action, through which entities, subjects and objects, come into being' (Haraway, 2008:71). In

short, dogs become pedigree dogs in the course of connections with idealised practices, images, histories; connections which are strengthened and intensified as their bodies are brought closer to the physical ideal of their breed, and which demand certain forms of engagement and response on the part of breeders and exhibitors.

As with other show-world practices, I argue here that the virtue of material practices of modification is contingent on the virtuosity of the practitioner. In line with recent anthropological work on ethics, I examine 'the centrality of ethical practice, judgement, reasoning, responsibility, cultivation, and questioning in social life' (Lambek, 2010:1). In doing so, I consider how particular forms of practice are made ethical in the contexts of certain relationships between breeders, dogs, and breeds, and how these specific relational forms allow breeders to know and respond to dogs-as-breed-members and breeds-as-populations-of-dogs. Throughout this chapter, my focus is on breeders' understandings of, and abilities to provide, 'good' care. Again, I pick up on the central importance of language and the concepts that particular terms represent in specific contexts. In particular, I return to the show-world use of the terms 'natural' and 'unnatural', and the ways in which these terms are deployed in support of – or in opposition to – different modification practices.

This chapter, then, raises the question of how breeders balance the needs of individual dogs and breed collectives, while maintaining the image of their breed in individual canine bodies. Following Mitchell (2005), I approach the conversation from the perspective that the appearance of the dog (picture) is the breeder's attempt to bring into view through skilled practice (medium) the breed ideal (image) in the body of a dog (object). I argue that, as far as the breeders who feature in this chapter are concerned, attempts to care for all three are one and the same thing. In their view, a healthy dog is one which meets with the image of its breed, so attempts to maintain the image described in the Breed Standard are, by and large, attempts to care for dogs as parts of a collective, as well as to enshrine the ethical value people, practices, and traditions.

As in previous chapters, I draw on the work of Kim Crowder (2015) and Candea et al. (2015) to argue that the careful balancing of affective distance can be ‘socially, politically, and ethically valued’ (Candea et al., 2015:1), and that taking this seriously does not equate to a rejection, but rather to a refinement, of relational approaches to care. As John Law observes, the choreography of care for multiple objects and entities – in this case, dogs, breeds, histories, practices, and Standards among others – ‘necessarily depends on the organisation of separations’ (Law, 2010:68). In Chapter Three, I argued that skilled breeders are often able to maintain a balance between affective distance and proximity even as they carry out ‘harmful’ practices, and that they do so on their understanding that these practices are in the best interest not only of the dog-as-breed-member, but also of the breed. What is important here is that the affective distance breeders cultivate is not akin to disengagement, but rather, implies proximity (Willerslev, 2007a), ensuring that they are neither too close nor too far removed. This is significant in that I suggest a steady proximity to both dog and breed might even be necessary *in order to do harm*, when that harm also equates to good care. Further developing this line of argument, I argue here that, without this carefully balanced affective proximity, exhibitors’ willingness – or refusal – to engage in ‘harmful’ practices remains problematic. In either case, it is ultimately seen to serve the interests of humans, rather than dogs or breeds.

### Breeds and their Histories

Over its 120-year history, the British Kennel Club has recognized more than 210 different breeds of pedigree dog. Each of these breeds is categorised as belonging to one of seven groups – Hound, Gundog, Terrier, Utility, Pastoral, Working, or Toy – in accordance with what breeders consider to be the breed’s original purpose or function; that is, breeds are categorised according to their economic and social role as presented in historical accounts. While academic histories of pedigree dog breeding suggest that the vast majority of breeds emerged only in the last 150 years (see Ritvo, 1987; Turner, 2010), most accounts from the show-breeding community suggest otherwise. As I explored in Chapter One, each breed

has its own historical account which tells of the breed's development in its country of origin, often tracing back hundreds, if not thousands, of years. To members of the show-community, breed histories are more than just interesting stories. They are a fundamental part of a breed's identity, and as such they shape many aspects of life for both dogs and breeders. Significantly, the histories of breeds also inform and legitimise Breed Standards – the written descriptions of the image of an ideal breed specimen against which the bodies of dogs are judged in the show-ring. As I suggested in Chapter One, breed histories and Breed Standards relate to a particular understanding of specific canine bodies and behaviours as 'natural', both in the sense that they relate to forms found in the natural world, and in the idiomatic sense wherein what is considered 'natural' is good, proper, and correct. Thus, breed histories and Standards have the combined effect of grounding show-world traditions and practices in the 'natural', which lends them a powerful source of moral legitimacy.

### In the show-ring

As Christina Grasseni argues of cattle fairs, dog shows too are 'important social events in which a community both celebrates and reinforces common criteria of excellence and common guidelines for accepted practice' (Grasseni 2004:50). As among the cattle breeders Grasseni works with, success in the dog show-ring is contingent on a shared 'skilled vision', which appreciates specific traits and qualities in the bodies of dogs. As I hope to have shown in Chapter Two, breeders have traditionally developed this skilled vision in the course of practical apprenticeships in the show-world by learning how to exhibit and assess dogs in the show-ring.

Appraisals carried out by dog show judges are not limited to visual inspections, but looking at the dogs is nonetheless the primary means of assessment. In most cases, dogs are exhibited in 'classes' with other dogs of similar age or show-winning status and, once all are present in the show-ring and the judge is ready to begin, all dogs and their handlers are asked to walk or run around the inner

periphery of the ring while the judge watches. After this, handlers and dogs line up to wait for their turn in front of the judge. When called up, each dog is encouraged by its handler to stand in the agreed-upon pose in which members of its breed are usually displayed, either standing on the floor or on a table, depending on the size of the dog. At this point, the judge conducts a thorough inspection of the dog, using both her eyes and hands to assess the dog from nose to tail. This includes opening the dog's mouth to check its teeth, feeling its limbs, shoulders, ribs, and spine, and – when assessing a male dogs – checking that it has two fully-descended testicles. With this 'hands-on' inspection complete, dog and handler are invited to walk or run in front of the judge, usually along a triangular path marked out in the show-ring, in order that the body of the dog can be assessed in motion from the front, back, and side. Once the first dog in the line-up has been assessed, the routine is repeated with each subsequent entrant. Then all the dogs are lined up in front of the judge who finally calls forward the winners, who will go on to compete in further rounds as the judge narrows them down to Best Male and Best Female. Of these final two, the animal crowned Best of Breed will be entered into Best in Group and, if successful, into the final competition – Best in Show.

What is evident from the get-go is that show-ring practices are highly ritualised. Dogs must be presented in a particular way, and as a number of breeders note with regret, an excellent, Breed Standard-fitting dog will not get far in the show-ring unless it is able to perform in front of the judge. The art of show-ring performance, or 'ring-craft' as it is known in the show-world, is thus something both exhibitors and dogs must learn if they are to succeed in competition. Seasoned exhibitors sometimes train their dogs themselves, but many others – both novice and experienced exhibitors – regularly attend local ring-craft classes where both dogs and handlers learn the routines of the show-ring under the guidance of experienced coaches.

'A really good handler can make an average dog look outstanding,' Otterhound breeder Jim muses early one spring morning as we watch exhibitors and dogs

warm-up for a Championship Show. Jim and I arranged to meet early. For once, Jim does not have a dog entered in the show and has come along merely to spectate. The large agricultural hall is still relatively empty and not yet heated by the presence of the two-thousand-plus dogs and accompanying exhibitors who will compete later in the day. After a brief tour, Jim and I sit on two of the many orange plastic chairs which, alongside lengths of red and white striped polythene tape, form the peripheries of ten temporary show-rings. Jim has chosen a spot at the side of one of the rings in which the Gundog breeds will be exhibited. As I specifically want to learn more about handling dogs in the show-ring, the Gundogs are, he assures me, the breeds to watch. 'Some of the best handlers are in Gundogs,' Jim tells me. 'What makes them so good?' I ask. 'They know how to get the best out of a dog,' he claims. After a short pause, he grins and adds conspiratorially: 'They also know how to hide a dog's faults.'

In Jim's case, the fun of spectating seems to be about spotting the faults that handlers are trying their best to hide. As the morning passes, he directs my attention to particular dogs, insisting I look closely at the way they and their handlers are moving and take note of the dogs' weak fronts or uneven gaits. My unskilled vision leaves me wondering, in some cases, whether Jim is winding me up or testing my abilities, particularly when he claims that a dog awarded a Challenge Certificate 'has terrible movement. [It] shouldn't even be in the ring.' In this case, however, Jim's evaluation is soon backed up by a friend of his, Anne, who is familiar with the dog in question and chuckles when she hears of its success. Agreeing with Jim, she tells me:

'Oh, that dog's terrible, but I'm not surprised it won. The handler – he's a professional and very well known. The [dog's] breeder will have employed him to handle the dog because he knows how to hide faults very effectively. Plus, [the handler] is a bit of a celebrity, so his face is a bit of a distraction for the judge.'

The show-world is full of nepotism, Jim wearily agrees, and judging, he informs me, is where it becomes most apparent. Despite what some breeders may claim,



however, he insists that 'it's not just the handler's face that is important.' A handler's skill is just as significant, and the way a dog is presented in the ring is, in some ways, as important as the conformation of the dog itself. As Anne tells me:

'You can have the best dog in the breed, but if you don't know how to handle it, to show it, you won't get anywhere. On the other hand, as you've seen today, a bad dog handled well can go a long way.'

Anne is eager to discuss the issue in more depth, telling me about one of her male dogs – a successful and popular stud – which in her words is 'a lovely dog, and a great sire, but has a major fault; his legs don't go back and forward when he moves, they go round and round.' Anne is convinced that the dog is otherwise an excellent example of his breed, and his body fits closely with the image of the ideal breed specimen as described in his Breed Standard. So, Anne explains:

'I've had to learn how to show him without it being noticeable. I've had to learn exactly what speed to move him at so you can't tell. And it's worked, he's got 2CCs [Challenge Certificates].'

There are many tricks exhibitors can employ to improve their dogs' chances in the show-ring, Anne insists. Allegedly, details as small as the type and colour of a lead can affect the way the dog is perceived and assessed by the judge. Kneeling next to a dog can make a small animal look bigger and standing can make a big dog look smaller, while changing the angle of a dog's head can change the appearance of its neck. But, I wonder, are judges not aware that specific dogs have faults? Surely, I suggest to Anne, if her own dog is a well-known stud dog, then his problems must be known to other people in the breed. 'Possibly,' Anne concedes, but according to her, that should not matter:

'What you have to understand about judging dogs is that we're taught to judge the dog as it appears in front of us in the ring – we are supposed to judge the dogs as they are on the day, not as we saw them last week, or based on what we've heard through gossip or read about in the newspapers.'

Reflecting on Anne's experience, both she and Jim agree that the art of good handling is about doing one's best to, as Jim puts it, 'present a dog so that it fits the Breed Standard.' Again, show-world understandings of what counts as 'good' emerge as specific to the practices of the show-ring. In line with the distinction Mitchell makes between pictures and images, good handling is seen as the ability to present the dog so as to provide a picture of a good breed specimen – in other words, a picture which fits with the image of the breed ideal as described in the Breed Standard. A good dog is one whose body presents a good picture in the show-ring, and a good judge is one who uses her skilled vision to assess that picture as it appears in front of her while disregarding prior knowledge of the dog.

Whether they are human or canine, those who fail to engage in certain forms of skilled practice are unlikely to succeed in the show-ring. Quite simply, such individuals are not considered to be 'good' in a sense that the show-ring acknowledges. On the other hand, dogs and handlers who do perform well in spite of the dog's physical imperfections might still be heralded as show-ring success stories. An anatomical fault can be ignored or over-looked as long as both dog and handler have the skills to stop the feature detracting from the overall picture of a Standard-fitting example of the breed. Hiding faults, in this sense, is not to be considered unethical but as best practice, and while it is not loudly promoted as virtuous, the ability to succeed in spite of faults distinguishes skilled handlers and well-trained show-dogs. Virtuosity, then, is not only found in the bodies of dogs, but in the forms of practice in which exhibitors and dogs engage, and which signify an ethical capacity in both participants of this co-performance.

### The Production of an Image

It is not only the behaviour of dogs, then, that is routinely adapted for the show-ring. Famously, and often controversially, dogs' coats and bodies are also routinely modified so as to fit the ideal. As in the case of Effie, the Chinese Crested Dog, the majority of these modification practices involve temporary changes to

the dogs' appearance. Most notoriously, all three varieties of Poodle – Toy, Miniature, and Standard – have traditionally been exhibited sporting what is known in the breed as a 'lion clip'. As one specialist website explains:

'The face, front legs between poms [hair over ankles] and elbow, hind quarter to the pom area and with the exception of the hip rosettes, feet, and base of tail are all shaved very closely. The [front body] area is left very, very long and scissored into shape. The top knot is left very long and pulled into a ponytail. The tail is given a very large pompon.'<sup>109</sup>



*Figure 19: A Miniature Poodle sporting a lion clip.<sup>110</sup>*

While some versions of the breed's history date the lion clip back 2,000 years to 'ancient' Poodle-like dogs of the Roman Palace,<sup>111</sup> other accounts trace the clip back to late 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe, where Poodles are said to have worked as

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<sup>109</sup> All Poodle Info (2013) 'Poodle Clips' <http://www.allpoodleinfo.com/poodle-clips> [last accessed 30/09/2015]

<sup>110</sup> Photo by Belinda (Flickr) [CC BY 2.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ASilver\\_Miniature\\_Poodle\\_stacked.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ASilver_Miniature_Poodle_stacked.jpg) [Retrieved 20/07/2016]

<sup>111</sup> A suggestion put forward by many Poodle breeders I consulted. See also, for example, *Mucky Pups* (2015) 'A very brief history of dog grooming.' <http://www.mucky-pups.co/brief-history-dog-grooming/> [last accessed 01/10/2015]

water-retrievers. As the author of the regular 'Pro-Groomer' column in *Dog World* newspaper tells readers:

'The Poodle was a sportsman's dog with a 'splendid nose' with the conformation of a tireless, powerful swimmer as well as an excellent retriever. His drawback was his heavy, thick, wool coat. Parts of the coat, considered less essential was therefore cut away, and coat left to protect vital parts such as the chest/heart, other organs and joints.'<sup>112</sup>

When I begin my fieldwork, the Poodle Breed Standard 'strongly recommend[s] that the traditional lion clip be adhered to' (Kennel Club, 2003:214). The practical demands this places on exhibitors are substantial, and a number – many of them relative newcomers to the breed – suggest to the Kennel Club that the Standard should be changed to allow for other, less ornate styling in the show-ring. The intention, supporters of the change claim, is to democratise competition, which is apparently dominated by a number of long-standing breeders, who are skilled in the art of trimming and styling. Novice exhibitors, unable to recreate the masterpieces that judges have come to expect, feel they are missing out on top honours regardless of whether or not the dogs underneath the coats are closer to the Breed Standard. These novices argue that the emphasis placed on styling has now become detrimental to the chances of success of most exhibitors and dogs. Adding to the mounting pressure on the Kennel Club, widespread rumours allege that fake hair pieces inserted into Poodle 'topknots' have become commonplace, and long-standing controversy over the abundant use of hairspray and other chemical styling products continues unabated.

Inevitably, requests to change the Poodle Breed Standard are met with much resistance from elite and powerful members of the show-world. *Dog World's* groomer-in-residence argues that, although the lion clip seen in historical images of working dogs 'was never as 'posh' as it is today ... the Poodle is 'posh'. It is a showy, fun loving, eye-catching exhibit.'<sup>113</sup> Is lack of talent or dedication on the

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<sup>112</sup> Geeson, E. (06/06/2012) 'Will the Poodle Ever Change its Image?' In *Dog World*.

<sup>113</sup> Geeson, E. (06/06/2012) 'Will the Poodle Ever Change its Image?' In *Dog World*.

part of less-experienced exhibitors a good enough reason to change the rules, the groomer asks while warning readers that:

‘There are fans of the Poodle trimmed completely off – like a farm dog. We surely do not want to ever see this trimming in the show-ring even if it brings great comfort to the dog and ease to the owner and groomer.’<sup>114</sup>

A Poodle’s significance in the show-world, then, involves a specific set of material practices which make the dog an object of virtue; that is, an aesthetically pleasing, skilfully crafted object which appeals to the sensibilities of virtuoso breeders and judges. Without the practical skill of the expert groomer and exhibitor to present the dogs in their Standard-fitting lion clip, Poodles are not pedigree show-dogs, but ‘like a farm dog’. In other words, Poodles in their unstylised state are out of place in the show-ring. While the comfort of both exhibitor and dog are acknowledged as subjects of concern, by this reasoning they are not the only or main focus of care. To the uninitiated onlooker, the need to retain the Standard-fitting aesthetic at the expense of the dogs’ comfort may appear to contradict the show-world emphasis on the correlation between breed and individual well-being. But, in the show-world, dogs are not merely dogs. They are pedigree dogs, and their existence is seen through a lens of different material concerns than those which define the lives of ‘pets’ or working dogs.

Hence, exhibitors showing Poodles are first and foremost charged with ensuring that the traditional image of the breed – the image that signifies its sporting history – remains intact and well-cared for. This responsibility becomes clear to me when, one summer morning, I head to a local dog show with my own dog, a Smooth Collie named Ali. By this point, I’ve just about got the hang of filling out the necessary forms to verify Ali’s Kennel Club registration and thus her right to compete in pedigree dog shows. I’m also realising that the number of Smooth Collies in Britain is so low that Ali is often the only one of her breed to appear in

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<sup>114</sup> Geeson, E. *Ibid.*

a dog show. This means that, more often than not, the two of us are relegated to classes for breeds 'Not Separately Classified', which feature other 'unpopular' breeds in the Pastoral Group – Australian Cattle Dogs, Swedish Vallhunds, Catalan Sheepdogs, and so forth. Competition between these breeds is held only once classes for the more popular ones have been judged. When we arrive at the show at 8:30 am, a quick look at the schedule tells me that we are unlikely to be called into the show-ring until 11:30 am. Experience tells me that two-year old Ali will soon get bored of waiting, and I decide to take her for a walk outside the venue.

On our way through the car park, I meet Joy, an exhibitor I've spent quite some time talking with at previous shows. Joy is unloading boxes of equipment from her van and, as I stop to help, I ask her when she's due in the show-ring. Not for another two hours, is her answer, so I suggest that she and her dog accompany Ali and me on our walk. The suggestion is met with a hearty laugh. Without a word, she opens the back door of her van and points to Charlie, a Poodle, who stands inside in a cage. The dog's coat has obviously been prepared for the show, and sections of fur are tied up in protective bunches, assumedly to prevent matting. 'No chance of him going anywhere,' Joy informs me as she heaves the dog's crate onto a wheeled trolley to take it into the show-hall. 'Besides, we don't walk him in places we have to put a collar on him. If he wears a collar it damages his coat around his neck. Anyhow,' she says, looking around, 'you're not taking her over *there*, are you?' she asks with some concern, looking at Ali. 'You've got her entered today, right?' Hesitant at the thought of offending her sense of propriety, yet unsure why exactly my suggestion is laughable, I simply tell her the truth. 'Yes, but do you think it's a bad idea?' After a pause, Joy sighs and tells me that:

'She'd be better off inside. It looks like the grass is pretty wet. And there's a river down that way. But if you're going, just make sure you keep her on the lead. And keep on the dry paths, don't let her feet get muddy. I know the judge [of Ali's class] and she won't be pleased if [Ali] is in a mess, believe me.'

Soon, Joy heads off toward the show-hall with Charlie, the crated prize-contender, while Ali and I spend the next forty minutes walking around what turns out to be a large area of light woodland, complete with well-tended paths and a fast-running stream. The sun is out and the air is pleasantly warm, and yet, despite the fact that upwards of 500 dogs are entered in the nearby show, the only other dog we see is a large crossbreed – a Labradoodle – running off-lead and splashing in and out of the stream. Although Ali strains on her lead, I keep her close, not wanting to take her back to the show wet and muddy.

When we arrive back, Joy is waiting for us, somewhat agitated. ‘Come here,’ she calls out, ushering me over to the side of the hall, where her grooming table is set up and Charlie the Poodle is sitting in his cage, fur still in bunches. ‘We need to clean [Ali’s] feet,’ she informs me, reaching for a spray-bottle of water and a packet of baby wipes. Ali struggles as I hold her body while Joy picks up one of her front paws. ‘You need to get her used to things like this,’ Joy tells me, sternly. ‘If you’re going to show a dog, it needs to get used to being groomed.’ It soon becomes apparent to me that Ali is not going to put up with the cleaning and I tell Joy not to bother; Ali is happier to sit and clean her feet by herself. ‘Well, have you got a crate to put her in?’ Joy asks. ‘No,’ I admit, again feeling slightly embarrassed as Joy tells me that, ‘You can’t very well let her sit on the floor. It’s all dirty – the dust will dull her coat.’ Pointing at her own dog, sitting in his cage, Joy tells me that:

‘When we have a show coming up, I bath him two days before and then he doesn’t get out even in the garden unless he’s under supervision so he doesn’t mess-up his coat. And then once we’re at the show, if he’s not on the grooming table, he’s in the crate. I don’t want him picking up dirt or playing about with other dogs ... If you’re bringing a dog to a show, you have to make sure it looks its very best. You’re representing its breed.’

Looking around, I realise Joy’s advice is in keeping with standard practice. As usual, the walls of the show hall are lined with cages like the one Charlie is sitting in, all housing dogs cleaned and groomed for exhibition. Of the dogs who are not

confined in cages, those at the feet of their owners are predominantly short-haired breeds whose coats are easy to wipe clean, or those like Deerhound and Irish Wolfhounds whose Breed Standards describe their appearance as rugged and relatively unkempt. By contrast, dogs of profusely coated breeds are kept off the floor, if not in cages then perched on grooming tables, where exhibitors brush and style them for the show-ring. Joy brings me back from my thoughts, asking me to keep an eye on Charlie while she goes back to the van to fetch another bag of styling products. 'I've got to get him on the table soon,' she tells me. 'Only an hour to go 'til we're in the ring. If I don't get started now, I'll never have him ready in time.' For the next hour, I watch as Joy fluffs and primps and scissors Charlie's fur, styles his top-knot, and – despite the threat of Kennel Club sanctions for the use of styling products – covers the dog top-to-tail with liberal amounts of hairspray. By the time he enters the show-ring, Charlie is every inch the image of a show-winning Poodle, and after they win first prize in their class, Joy is repeatedly commended on the dog's presentation. 'You want to learn about dog showing,' one elderly gentleman observes, pointing at Charlie. 'That's what a real show-dog looks like.'

Joy has done a good job, other observers at the show agree. In Mitchell's (2005) terms, she has excelled in the material practices of grooming and styling through which a picture of a show-winning Poodle has been realised, with Charlie's body providing the canvass. The dog's appearance is now in keeping with the idealised image of his breed; an image promoted and protected by Joy's skilled realisation of the ideal. Less accomplished attempts, I am told, would not only fail to do justice to the dog's potential as an ideal breed specimen. They would also be a slight on the image of the breed itself. By means of her elaborate grooming, however, Joy has fulfilled her responsibilities to both dog and breed, and thus displayed her ability to engage in particular forms of skilled practice which signal both her virtue and virtuosity as an exhibitor of pedigree dogs. Her show-world duties to present Charlie in the idealised image of his breed, then, require Joy to engage in situated practices of care for Charlie and his breed; practices which reflect the



connection they share, not merely as owner and pet, but as exhibitor and pedigree show-dog.

### Illicit Modification

In some breeds, preparing a dog for the show-ring involves little more than washing and blow-drying their coat, and perhaps a quick brush with a conditioning spray at the last minute to improve texture and shine. In most breeds, however, it seems that at least some strategic trimming or thinning of the coat is expected. In some cases, as with the Poodle varieties, exhibitors clip and trim in full sight of onlookers, while in other cases, coat trimming is cited as bad practice in Breed Standards. Across the board, though, this sort of superficial adaptation has long been accepted as widespread and routine. Even in breeds where coat trimming is officially prohibited, most exhibitors are happy to admit that they usually trim their dogs' coats before a show, albeit at home and well out of sight of rivals and dog show officials. In other breeds, modifications are more substantial. Generally speaking, the more substantial these changes are, the less willing exhibitors are to talk about them, at least in public. Yet the whispered 'open secrets' about the modification of dogs tell of a multitude of covert practices, ranging from coat-dyeing to surgical interventions, all of which aim to remake the sub-Standard bodies of dogs in the images of their breeds.

Since the 1920s, Kennel Club regulations have stipulated that:

'No substance which alters the natural colour, texture or body of the coat may be present in the dog's coat for any purpose at any time during the Show.'<sup>115</sup>

Nonetheless, the use of styling products to modify dogs' coats is so common that when the Kennel Club – aware of public concern over the excessive use of chemical styling products – introduced randomised coat testing at dog shows in 2011, all dogs tested were found to have banned substances on their coats. The

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<sup>115</sup> *Kennel Club 'Regulations Booklet.'* See [http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/49543/breed\\_show.pdf](http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/49543/breed_show.pdf) [last accessed 30/09/2015].

tests were soon suspended when a petition demanding an end to the testing gathered the signatures of over 3,000 exhibitors, all of whom agreed that the use of powder, lacquer, and silicon-based grooming products should not be penalised.<sup>116</sup> After all, exhibitors argued, these products don't, as the Kennel Club suggests, alter 'the natural colour, texture, or body' of the dogs coats. Quite the opposite, they enable breeders to realise these features in their 'natural' form, that is, in their Standard-fitting form.

By 2013, Kennel Club rules prohibiting the use of styling products were back in place, but widespread and open use of said products remains the norm. Most obviously, the air around grooming benches which house West Highland White Terriers are thick with the smell of the chalk and talcum-powders exhibitors use to whiten the dogs' coats. A few onlookers from other breeds occasionally call 'foul' at these tactics, but those who express their outrage do so only among their peers and not, to my knowledge, in any formal context. 'You see people using chalk and talc all the time,' one exhibitor complains to me. 'You walk in to a show sometimes and the whole place stinks of talc. It's annoying, but no one ever reports it.' Exhibitors of Westies and other white-coated breeds, meanwhile, insist that moderate use of chalk or talc is fair-play, and that it helps to realise the 'true' picture of the breed. As Elinor, a fierce supporter of West Highland White Terriers explains:

'[West Highland White Terrier Exhibitors] need to use chalk – [the dogs'] coats get stained and discoloured, which is not how they should look ... using chalk to whiten coats is only making [the dog] look like it would naturally ... if I were a judge, I wouldn't think very highly of someone who brought a dog into the ring all messy and stained.'

Like many of her peers, Elinor feels that using chalk is a legitimate, necessary means of returning the appearance of the dog to its 'natural' form. Rather than

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<sup>116</sup> *Our Dogs* (05/2011) 'Coat Testing Proposal Leads to Suspension of Testing.' <https://www.ourdogs.co.uk/News/2011/May2011/News270511/coat.htm> [accessed 30/09/2015]

seeing the use of chalk as a problem, she believes that those who fail to do so are remiss in their duty towards dog and breed.

While the use of chalk and talk is often apparent, other products which change the colour of dogs' coats are used more surreptitiously. Exhibitors claim that boot polish, mascara, face paints, hair dye, and black marker pens are all used by acquaintances to add black pigment to dogs' coats or noses, although the few that admit to using these products themselves do so privately and on the strict understanding that I will not disclose their identities. Yet although these practices are neither openly talked about nor encouraged, the fact remains that exhibitors often pour scorn on those who present a dog which lacks 'good' pigmentation for its breed. As one exhibitor tells me – again, on the condition of strict anonymity:

'Of course you have to do something about it if [a dog's] pigment isn't good. [My dog] is a sound example of the breed, but he does lack pigment. When his breeder found out I wanted to show him, she said she would be so embarrassed if he were in the ring under her name unless we were to do something to correct his faults. We were new to [showing dogs] back then, but she told us how to fill in the patches [on the dog's coat].'

Even these illicit modification practices are often so normalised and widespread that they have become incorporated into the established routines of care associated with particular breeds. As Kathleen notes of her Chinese Crested Dogs, 'There isn't a dog in the ring that hasn't had hair removed.' As with the dying of coats, hair removal remains an open secret, and Kathleen and her fellow Chinese Crested Dog exhibitors are all adamant that they would never remove their dogs' hair in public. 'It's not allowed, really,' Kathleen giggles as she and a group of other exhibitors discuss hair removal in hushed voices at the side of a show-ring. 'Every dog here has had it done, but it's not something we broadcast.' While the practice is officially discouraged, even senior members of staff at the Kennel Club claim that hair removal is not a problem so long as dogs exhibited in the show-ring do

not display signs of stubble rash or skin burns.<sup>117</sup> As long as no associated problems are made evident in the show-ring, then, Chinese Crested owners can continue to use razors, tweezers, and creams to depilate their dogs.

Arguably, the imperative to make sure the bodies of these dogs meet with the 'natural' image described in their Breed Standard means that, in the show-world, hair removal is a necessary practice of care. The extra challenge exhibitors face, then, is to make sure the bodies of their Chinese Crested Dogs do not show problematic side-effects of hair removal which divulge the secrets of their practice. As long as the smooth skin *looks* 'natural' and maintains the image of a hairless breed, all is well. The result is a hidden selection process which advantages skilled groomers and beauticians. As Kathleen explains, 'There are some people who seem to make a really bad job of [hair removal]. [They're] hardly ever in the [show] ring because their dogs have sore skin from it.' Likewise, she claims: 'Some dogs don't get on very well with [hair removal]. You just have to hope yours tolerates it.' Tolerates the practice or the chemicals, I ask. 'Both,' she replies. 'Some won't stay still – they just don't have the patience – and others, yeah, they just have very sensitive skin.' A 'good' Chinese Crested Dog, then, is not merely one who fits the Breed Standard, but also one who does not resist the hair removal process and whose skin does not react adversely to various chemicals and treatments. Just as importantly, though, and just as is the case of Poodles, the success of a particular dog also relies on the skills of the exhibitor who prepares it for exhibition in the show-ring: on the exhibitor's proficiency in physically *re-making* the body of the dog in the image of its breed, rather than simply accepting it as it has been made by the breeder, or indeed as it would have been made by nature alone.

### Modifying Faults

The bottom line, it seems, is that being a 'good' exhibitor requires both the ability and the willingness to make the body of one's dog fit the image described in its

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<sup>117</sup> Personal communication with Kennel Club Staff, March 2012.

Breed Standard. While critical onlookers, including the producers of 2008's *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*, voice ethical concerns about the potential misery and suffering that physical modifications bring to individual dogs, in the show-world the dominant discourse surrounding modification speaks of a different set of priorities. In most cases, modifications which bring dogs closer to their Breed Standards are not an ethical concern but a moral duty. Whether or not Kennel Club rules allow for it, the fact is that modification has become such common practice that exhibitors of certain breeds who do not alter the bodies of their dogs are seen to neglect their duties of care.

Again, the obligation to modify non Standard-fitting features becomes evident as I begin to involve my own dog, Ali, in my research. As their Breed Standard tells it, Smooth Collies – like Rough Collies and their smaller cousins, Shetland Sheepdogs – have floppy tips to their ears: ‘approximately two-thirds of ear standing erect, top third tipping forward naturally, below horizontal.’<sup>118</sup> The ears of some dogs’ do, indeed, flop over ‘naturally’, but in many cases they do not, and the discord between the description in the Breed Standard and the ears of actual dogs is widely noted among exhibitors. None I consult is sure *why* this feature is important – it doesn’t seem to relate to the original function of the breed as stock-herders – yet nonetheless exhibitors are adamant that tipped ears are important. All agree that dogs with erect ears are ‘unnatural’ – in other words, they are not as they should be – and one of the challenges of owning a Smooth Collie, Rough Collie, or Shetland Sheepdog is to make sure that its ears are ‘fixed’ at a young age. Consequently, exhibitors often spend the first months – even years – of a dog’s life working to soften and break down the cartilage of the ear in order to achieve the ‘tipped’ appearance.

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<sup>118</sup> Kennel Club (2013) ‘Smooth Collie Breed Standard.’ <http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/services/public/breed/standard.aspx?id=5120> [accessed 22/09/2013]



*Figure 20: Smooth Collie, Ali, with her non-Standard ears.<sup>119</sup>*

The fact that Ali, who often accompanies me to dog shows and ring-craft training classes, has never had her ears ‘fixed’ is a source of serious concern for other exhibitors, a number of whom rally round to offer advice and support in the hope that I might be able to correct the fault. ‘Sit with her next to you when you watch TV at night and massage her ears,’ I am frequently advised. As one Rough Collie exhibitor explains: ‘You just need to fold [the ears] over and keep rubbing the crease – eventually the cartilage will soften and they will flop.’ Should this not work, I am told to weigh the tips of Ali’s ears down with Blu-Tack or a penny stuck with tape or water-based glue to the tip. Another common suggestion is that I should apply *Plumber’s Mate*, a sticky putty used to stop leaks in water pipes, which will stick the ears down and is harder for dogs to remove. If nothing else works, I am quietly told at a ring-craft class, a particular informant can supply a solvent product which, if applied daily, will cause the cartilage in Ali’s ears to dissolve. The advice all comes with the very best wishes. Ali ‘will be a good dog if you get her ears sorted,’ I am frequently assured.

Yet as my research continues, friendly advice about Ali’s ears is replaced by frowns and irritation. I have, half-heartedly, been following exhibitors’ advice and

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<sup>119</sup> Photo author’s own.

rubbing Ali's ears while I sit with her in the evenings, although I only remember to do so once or twice a week, usually on evenings after I've been to a dog show. Ali tolerates this attention at first, but soon gets up from her seat next to me on the couch and sits alone on the floor, giving me the distinct impression that she doesn't like what I am doing to her. For a few days, I try using Blu-Tack but this quickly falls off and the need to frequently re-apply means it becomes bothersome to both Ali and Myself. I soon stop trying to intervene and Ali's ears remain fully erect. All the while, show-world acquaintances are becoming ever more annoyed at my lack of progress, and ever more suspicious of me as a potentially hostile critic of show-world practice. Betraying the fact that I am not in full support of show-ring traditions, Ali's erect ears lead some informants to raise new objections to my presence as a researcher in the community.



*Figure 21: Ali with Blu-Tack applied and her ears, which are correctly folded.<sup>120</sup>*

Other breeders and exhibitors seem less concerned about my personal views than they are about the damage I might cause to the image of the breed. 'You need to get that sorted. You can't take her to a show like that,' snaps one well-known judge after several months spent coaching Ali and me at ring-craft. Not sure how

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<sup>120</sup> Photo author's own.

to respond, I mumble that I've tried but that I don't think Ali's ears are going to tip over. Exasperated, he insists that:

'You're obviously not really trying. You shouldn't take on a breed if you aren't going to do the best you can for it. It's part of your duty to the breed.'

The duty to care for a pedigree show-dog, this man and other exhibitors tell me, extends beyond an owner's care for the individual animal. Having taken on a responsibility of care for Ali, I have also taken on a responsibility of the care for her breed. As they see things, I am duty-bound to ensure that, if I am exhibiting her as a Smooth Collie, Ali meets with the image of the breed ideal. To fail in this respect is to deface and destabilise the image of the breed.

As an exhibitor and long-time breeder of Boxer Dogs, Sylvia, later observes, my failure to modify Ali's ears signals that *I* am simply 'not show-ring material'. I have developed the wrong sort of relationship with my dog to do well in the show-world, Sylvia tells me. In her estimation, I am, 'more of a pet owner', which will 'make it hard to understand the needs of the breed.' Sylvia criticises me, along with most pet owners, for not having the requisite ability to see my dog outwith the context of our intersubjective relationship, something which a good exhibitor, breeder, or show judge has to be able to do. Looking at a dog from a show-world perspective doesn't mean ignoring the fact that the dog might be a nice companion, Sylvia insists, but to her mind, I have become 'too close' in my emotional proximity to Ali as a 'pet', rather than maintained the appropriate distance at which show-dogs should be held. My failure to cultivate myself as an exhibitor and Ali as a show-dog has now led to a situation, Sylvia tells me, wherein Ali 'is already ruined'. Gradual, belated detachment is not an option here – at least not according to Sylvia:

'It's very difficult to draw away from a dog, to change things in that sense. That's why you find lots of people who show dogs have kept the first dog they got as a pet – they take it to a show and realise their mistakes. Of course, most people's first dogs are pretty rubbish by a



judge's standard anyway, so it's not such a problem. But if someone is serious about showing, they will realise they need to get more dogs, but that they need to make sure they raise them as show-dogs.'

Once a close affective relationship between owner and dog has been established, she tells me, it becomes very difficult to change the way in which dogs and humans relate to one another. Ali could still be a good show dog, Sylvia claims, but not in my hands. Likewise, I might still prove to be a successful exhibitor, but I would need to get a new dog and establish the correct affective distance from the beginning of our relationship.

If I were to get another Smooth Collie, Sylvia argues, a commitment to maintaining an appropriate affective distance would help me cultivate the visual perspective of a show-world expert. What is more, it would allow me a different perspective on the virtue and the necessity of practices such as ear-creasing. In the show-world, as among Kim Crowder's pig-breeders, the maintenance of affective distance 'offers the means to ensure objectivity and promote clear judgement' (Crowder, 2015:96) in the face of questions about the ethics of certain care practices. In my case, skilled vision would allow me to see a subsequent dog as a member of its breed and thus as the focus of a different set of concerns than those which currently shape the way I care for Ali in both affective and practical terms. In short, my limited understanding of what Ali is limits not only my ability to care about her as a pedigree Smooth Collie. It also limits my ability to provide certain forms of care to her individually.

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If other exhibitors are to be believed, Ali is unusual in resisting my attempts to remodel her ears. The modifications made to Collies' ears may seem bizarre to the show-world outsider, but – on the assumption that most other dogs are not troubled by the procedure – the use of glue or blu-tacking arguably poses little threat to the dogs' health or welfare. Although ear-fixing is a regular topic of discussion in the breed, the ethics of the practice are not brought into question

by other exhibitors I talk to. Except with regard to the use of corrosive solvents, there is no suggestion that the practice might be problematic. Indeed, my claims that Ali rejects my attempts to intervene are quickly dismissed by other exhibitors, and my concerns are written off as a symptom of my own laziness and unwillingness to fulfil my duty to the breed. In short, my own ethical failings, rather than the ethics of the practice, are the issue of concern.

Ethically problematic though it may appear to outsiders, ear-breaking is widely acknowledged in the show-world and generally agreed to be in the best interests of both dog and breed. Ethical concerns over other practices of modification are much more difficult for exhibitors to counter with the notion that they serve a higher good, namely that of the breed. A few months into fieldwork, I meet Janice, an elderly Terrier exhibitor, as she struggles to transport her two dogs and several carrier-bags full of equipment across the large car-park adjacent to the Royal Highland Showground in Edinburgh. Janice is a bundle of nerves – after helping her to the show-hall, I spend most of the morning engaging her in conversation, aware that, when not distracted by my efforts, she is becoming more and more worked-up. I put Janice's agitation down to the fact that she is debuting her newest and youngest dog: a six-month old Terrier which she calls Barney. Some months later I find out that, while Barney's show-ring debut is a source of concern, it goes beyond the usual show-ring anxieties. For the previous three months, Janice has been involved in an increasingly fierce dispute with Barney's breeder – a well-known presence in the breed and show-world at large – who is aghast that Janice is planning to enter Barney in the show. Barney, it turns out, is not what many in the show-world consider to be a good example of his breed. His main problem is that his tail stands at the wrong angle to his body. Janice, like many other small-time exhibitors, is not particularly concerned about winning prizes. Showing dogs, she tells me, is a nice day out – something she can do with her dogs to keep her active and bring her into contact with people who share her interest in the breed. Barney's breeder, on the other hand, is a figure of some celebrity with a reputation to uphold. Her kennel is known all over the world for producing Champion stock, and she is adamant that – Barney's tail

being the way it is – Janice should not enter him in a show lest his appearance damage the reputation of his natal kennel.

The breeder has offered Janice a solution. Janice can do what certain Terrier breeders have allegedly been doing for decades; she can break and reset her dog's tail. The conversation, as I later find out, has been going on for several months. Janice claims she did not originally plan to show Barney due to a decline in her own health, and his breeder apparently sold the dog on the basis that he would be kept as a pet, out of sight from the show-world. Janice has since changed her mind; her other dogs will soon be too old to exhibit, and – newly aware of the social benefits of the hobby – she has decided that showing Barney is the only way to participate in community life. The breeder has not taken the news well. After several weeks of heated phone calls, she finally told Janet that, if she is going to go ahead, she will have to sort out Barney's tail. Janice was advised that, if she could not do so herself, there are others who might be willing to help, albeit for a fee. Janet should come up with a convincing story in case a vet ever notices the break, but, the breeder assured her, Barney is a young dog and his tail will heal quickly and correctly. Besides, Janice was told, Barney is otherwise a good dog, and if only his tail was 'fixed', the two of them might stand a real chance of success in the show-ring.

A few months later, Janice and I sit together in her living room and she tells me that:

'I won't lie; I did consider it. For a few days, I thought it was just something I would have to do. I knew I couldn't do it myself, but I thought if [the breeder] could sort it out, I'd have to go along with it. You probably think I'm a bad person because of that, but you don't know the sort of pressure [the breeder] put me under. She knows everyone, and she made all kinds of threats.'

Eventually, Janice became sick with worry and confided in her niece who is neither a dog owner nor involved in the show-world but was so outraged by the situation that she threatened to call both the Kennel Club and the RSPCA if the

breeder pushed Janice any further. The pressure on Janice has since subsided, but, as Janice recalls:

‘[the breeder] told me if I showed Barney the way he is, she would make sure my name was mud. [She] said it was just what she would have to do – to protect herself.’

By the time I hear the story, four months after we meet at the show, Janice claims she is pleased that Barney has not suffered. However, she is still not sure that she has ‘done the right thing’. In trying to protect her dog, she has made an ethical decision to go against established show-world practice – if not in her refusal to break the dog’s tail, then in her decision to exhibit a dog with a serious fault. Other exhibitors who are aware of the situation agree that she has done the right thing in not breaking Barney’s tail. Even Alec, who classes himself as a staunch advocate of show-world traditions, takes the view that, in suggesting the dog’s tail should be broken, Barney’s breeder failed to balance the wellbeing of dog and breed. There is no doubt, he tells me, that the dog does not belong in the show-ring, not even if its tail were to be broken and reset, because the genetic problem, even if rendered invisible on the surface, would nevertheless persist and pose a threat to the breed if Janice should ever decide to breed from Barney. Rather than apply pressure to a hopeful exhibitor, though, he argues that Barney’s breeder should have placed him in a home where there was no chance of ending up in the show-ring. It is not only Janice who has failed in her duties to the breed by exhibiting an inferior specimen, he concludes, but also Barney’s breeder, whose attempts to make Janice and Barney shoulder the consequences of her bad judgement are, in Alec’s view, a sign of irresponsible breeding practice.

Contrary to certain outside criticism, then, there are limits to what most breeders will do to dogs in their attempts to ensure they meet with Breed Standards. Only the most hardened breeders will engage in ‘unnatural’ practices – like tail-breaking – which are likely to cause dogs extensive suffering. These breeders, Alec observes, have the opposite problems of pet owners; they have become too distanced from individual dogs, to the point where meeting the image of the breed

has become the only concern. In line with Haraway's argument that the ability to provide good care 'grows with the capacity to respond, that is responsibility' (2008:71), I argue that, in the case of Barney's breeder, her felt responsibility to the needs of the breed have led to a situation wherein she is no longer respectful of, nor indeed able to respond to, the needs of the dog. In this sense, her practice lacks both the relational skill and the ethical virtue necessary to provide good care.

In Chapter Three, I argued that the ability to maintain a steady relational proximity to dogs even in the course of 'harmful' care practices is key to the ethics of the practice and the virtue of the practitioner. The virtue, for instance, of emotionally challenging practices like tail-breaking or culling hinges on the ability to resist creating distance while doing harm. Barney's breeder does the opposite. Here, the problem is that she has engaged in harmful practices – if somewhat peripherally – while remaining *at too much of a distance* from her dogs. As Kim Crowder argues of the 'artisanal affections' which guide skilled pig farmers when providing care to pigs and their herds, good breeders must cultivate and maintain certain qualities in order to provide good care. Among these qualities, 'compassion, empathy, emotional ... and social distance/proximity are inextricably interwoven' (Crowder, 2015:96). When breeders become too removed from their dogs, compassion and empathy are lost. Then, harming a dog simply equates to bad practice, not to good care. Again, my argument here is that good breeders and exhibitors must maintain a steady affective proximity to both dog and breed, – so whenever harming an individual dog is necessary for the greater good of dog and breed, said harm can be practiced in an ethically virtuous, caring way.

As Alec insists, too much distance leads to bad breeding practice. The kennels of hardened breeders may be full of Standard-Fitting dogs but, among those 'in the know', the reputations of these breeders will suffer the consequences of their inability to attend to the needs of their dogs as well as their breeds. Confounding his disapproval, Alec points out that modifications like tail-breaking are not,

ultimately, in the interest of the breed. After all, if the dog goes on to become a show-winner and is subsequently in demand as a stud-dog, he is likely to pass on his faulty tail-set to his offspring. So, just as becoming too close to a dog can obscure a breeder's view of the animals as a member of its breed, getting too caught up in a breed can obscure the breeders view of a breed as a population of living dogs, replete with their own agency and the ability to pass on problematic traits, no matter how well a breeder manages to hide them.

## Conclusion

Inevitably, then, the bodies of pedigree dogs have gone the same way as other animal bodies on display – they have become what Jane C. Desmond refers to as 'the sites of an ideological framing of history, nature, and tradition' (1999:xvii). But what is more, the images that encapsulate and signify these ideologies define what does or does not belong on the bodies of pedigree dogs, and which of these canine bodies do or do not belong in their breeds. So, while dogs are ideally bred to fit the image of their Breed Standard, when they fail to do so by selective breeding, modifications which remake the bodies of dogs in their 'natural' and proper order are understood to be skilled, virtuous acts of care. In terms of the opposition between what is considered to be 'natural' and 'unnatural', I have here argued that it is not merely the un(re)touched bodies of dogs which hold value in relation to what the show-world considers to be the 'natural' image of the breed. There is a lesson exhibitors learn as soon as they start handling dogs in the show-ring: as long as the picture of the dog presented to the judge is unproblematic – as long as faults are hidden – the dog will be viewed as a good example of its breed.

Standard-fitting bodies can be produced through the skilled use of either selective breeding or bodily modification practices, and although practices which alter the physical conformation of dogs are outlawed by the Kennel Club, most are in use anyway and their widespread endorsement remains an open secret in the show-world. As I have argued in the case of the routine hair-removal practices

employed by exhibitors of Chinese Crested Dogs, the concern is not that exhibitors engage in these practices, but that the practices are not made evident in the public setting of the show-ring – that the images of dogs and breeds remain ‘natural’, even if the processes through which the Standard-Fitting bodies of dogs are produced would suggest otherwise.

That modification and adaptation in the show-world are expected and in certain camps even encouraged relies on a notion of truth that is at odds with science-based approaches to the canine body. The majority of dog people do not recognise any obligation to uphold rationalistic notions of ‘objectivity’ of the sort Daston and Galison have observed in Western scientific practice (2007:53). Refraining from ‘retouching’ canine bodies and hiding faults is not an obvious act of virtue in the show-world, yet virtue lies in the potential for these bodies to be made to fit the image of the Breed Standard. And this process of modification is always and inherently subjective in that success relies on the individual breeder’s learned skills in looking at, assessing, and adapting the body of the dog, that and the individual dog’s ability and willingness to accept this modification. The pursuit of what is natural, then, involves a certain form of care, one which incorporates secrecy and silence, and requires exhibitors – and canine bodies – not to betray in public certain aspects of their practice. In this sense, then, a good dog is one which can be made to fit the idealised image of the breed, and a good exhibitor can present a Standard-fitting dog in the show-ring without evidence that the dog is anything but the product of ‘nature’.

Yet show-world practice extends beyond the show-ring, and if they are to truly achieve success in the wider show-world, good exhibitors, like good breeders, must learn to carefully balance the needs of dogs and their breeds. When it comes to my own abilities as an exhibitor, my care for Ali places too much focus on the individual dog at the expense of the breed. While Sylvia and many of her peers appreciate the ethical concerns and forms of care which characterise pet ownership, many agree that these are not always the appropriate ways of relating to a pedigree dog. The lesson is simple: if they want to succeed in the show-ring,

exhibitors must remain at an appropriate affective distance to their dogs, and must not allow their relationships with individual dogs to obscure their view of the animals as members of their breeds. Just as important, however, is that this affective distance is evenly balanced. Just as breeders must retain a perspective which allows them to view dogs as breed members, they must also retain an awareness of the breed as a population of dogs. As I hope to have shown in this chapter, it is *through* the bodies of their dogs that breeders care for their breeds. Again, I stress the point that good care for dog and breed does not require a careless detachment from the individual so as to care for the collective. Rather, good care involves remaining at an appropriate distance from both dog and breed in order to see – and attend to – both.





## Chapter Five – Pathology or Perfection? Care and responsibility in the show-ring and the clinic

Late in October of 2011, I sit in a comfortable armchair, the frame made of polished hard-wood, the cushion upholstered in royal-green fabric to match the Kennel Club's logo. The grand building that is home to the Kennel Club headquarters is located in the exclusive Mayfair district of the City of Westminster in the heart of central London. It seems a far cry from the run-down leisure centres and community halls of small-town Britain, where I have been spending much of my time attending dog shows.<sup>121</sup> The library I am sitting in is warm and quiet, and although there are no other visitors browsing the bookshelves, the room has a feeling of intentional silence. Great dogs of the past look down from oil paintings, standing guard over Europe's largest collection of dog-related books. Across the table from me sits one of the Kennel Club's senior advisors in canine health; an individual who holds several university-level awards in veterinary-scientific learning, and is a well-known specialist in the field.

The subject of our hushed conversation is pedigree dog health or, more specifically, the health of 15 breeds which have lately been causing the Kennel Club's management significant concern. 'They're awful. Beyond redemption, if you ask me,' my informant sighs before leaning across the table to tell me that:

'We'd de-register [the 15 breeds] tomorrow, if we could, but of course the [Kennel Club] membership won't let us do that. So we have to work around them. We have to quietly make it difficult for people to keep breeding dogs with these sorts of extreme health problems ... but how do we get people to see just how unhealthy these breeds are, that's the

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<sup>121</sup> In 2012, as part of a £129,000,000 deal with property development company British Land, the Kennel Club headquarters are relocated to a different address in Clarge Street. The development company goes on to turn the original Kennel Club building into luxury apartments, the sale of which break all previous records for property prices in London's exclusive Mayfair district, some selling for 'well over' £5,000 per square foot. See: Jones, R. (22/09/2014) 'Mayfair Property prices break £5,000 per square foot record.' *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/sep/22/mayfair-flat-sales-break-record> [accessed 08/11/2015]

question. You've heard of 'kennel blindness'? Well, we have that in the show-world, en mass. So now we need to make breeders see what *we* see when we look at these breeds.'

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Four-and-a-half months later, in March 2012, the dog showing community is abuzz with the usual excitement at the imminent start of Crufts, the world's biggest dog show, held annually in Birmingham's NEC arena. For many exhibitors and judges, this excitement is tinged with a feeling of apprehension as, for the first time in the show's history, the Best of Breed-winning dogs from each of the 15 breeds causing most concern at the Kennel Club will be subject to a veterinary check before their award is confirmed. The list of these so-called 'High Profile Breeds' includes the Bulldog, French Bulldog, Pug, St. Bernard, Chow Chow, Shar Pei, Pekingese, Basset Hound, Mastiff, Neapolitan Mastiff, Bloodhound, Dogue De Bordeaux, German Shepherd, Clumber Spaniel, and Chinese Crested Dog – all of them well-established breeds with illustrious histories and the chosen favourites of many of the show-world's reigning elite.

Yet while the High Profile Breeds are well-regarded by many in the show-world, critical onlookers take a very different view. Veterinary surgeons, politicians, animal welfare charities, and members of the general public are all concerned that pedigree dogs in general – and the High Profile Breeds in particular – are suffering as a result of physical exaggerations. As recent reports into pedigree dog health conclude, the flattened faces of Pugs, Bulldogs, French Bulldogs, and Pekingese cause breathing difficulties; excessive skin folds leave Basset Hounds, Bulldogs, Pugs, Mastiffs, and Bloodhounds prone to dermatitis and infection; eye problems – including entropion and ectropion<sup>122</sup>, inverted eyelashes and herniated third eyelids – affect the wellbeing of Basset Hounds, St. Bernards, Bloodhounds, Clumber Spaniels, Bulldogs and Mastiffs; and poor hip and spine

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<sup>122</sup> Ectropion refers to the gaping or turning away of the eyelid from the eyeball. Entropion refers to the eyelid turning in on itself, meaning fur or eyelashes may come into contact with the eyeball.

development cause a high incidence of lameness and discomfort in all of the above (see Bateson, 2010; Rooney & Sargan, 2009; Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare, 2009). Finally, Chinese Crested Dogs – which have not been included on the list due to concerns over conformational defects, but rather due to worries about excessive hair removal techniques – appear in the show-ring with signs of razor rash and chemical burns on their skin. And as though all this is not controversial enough, critics argue, the very dogs whose bodies show the most visible evidence of pathology are winning prizes in the show-ring.

The Kennel Club's attempted solution is to invite vets to give their expert opinions on the health of show-winning pedigree dogs. Implicitly, then, vets are invited to give their expert opinions on the skills of the show-world's top breeders and judges. The vet checks will demonstrate to breeders as well as to the public that the Kennel Club is taking health matters seriously, and that it expects breeders and exhibitors to do the same, at least I am told that this is the organisation's intended message. Starting at Crufts 2012, each of the Best of Breed-winning dogs from the 15 High Profile Breeds will be escorted with their owner or handler to a behind-the-scenes veterinary office, where the dog will be assessed by a vet. These examinations are intended to mirror those which judges carry out in the show-ring; they are to last no more than a couple of minutes and involve only a visual assessment of the dog's body. Like judges in the show-ring, vets cannot use any diagnostic aides. Subsequent to Crufts 2012, vet checks will be carried out on winning dogs from the High Profile Breeds at all General and Group Championship Shows,<sup>123</sup> and all show-winners in the High Profile Breeds will have to pass a vet check before they are declared a Show Champion. As is the case at Crufts, any dog which fails a vet check will be denied the honour of Best of Breed and prevented from entering the subsequent Group competition or Best in Show. Unsurprisingly, many in the show-world are outraged. Veterinary expertise is not only being given new authority and new power in the show-

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<sup>123</sup> General Championship Shows cover all breeds, and Group Shows are limited to one or two breed groups, i.e. the Gundog Group.

world, but this is happening publically and in the very heart of the community: in the show-ring itself.

As the first day of Crufts 2012 gets underway, news begins to circulate that two winning dogs – the Bulldog and the Pekingese – have failed their veterinary checks. How can this be? exhibitors ask. The two dogs are well-known show winners and have been selected by two of the show-world's most experienced and respected judges. Exhibitors in the other High Profile Breeds are now starting to worry in earnest – if these paragons of the show-ring have failed their checks, how will their own dogs fare under close veterinary examination? By the evening, Facebook pages are filled with messages of support for the owners and judges of the disqualified dogs, and the community's shock is tipping over into anger. Day Two of the show is marked by widespread outrage when a well-known Clumber Spaniel – an International Show Champion, no less – fails her vet check, allegedly on account of excessive 'haw', that is, exposed membrane around her eyes. By the time we reach Sunday's Best in Show competition, six of the fifteen dogs tested have failed their vet checks, and the verdicts of six of the show-world's most prominent and revered judges have been over-ruled.

Information about how the vet checks are conducted and what exactly they involve comes to light as exhibitors go public with their experiences and thus fuel the growing outrage in the show-world. Despite the Kennel Club's assurances that the vet checks would mirror the judges' assessment of the dogs, it soon emerges that instruments including a pen torch and a stethoscope have been used in the clinical examinations. Adding to the upset, witnesses report that the dogs have been 'subjected to unreasonable amounts of exercise', being made to run back and forth while the vet assesses movement and breathing. Soon, the vets themselves are under scrutiny as breeders voice concerns about the motivations of any individual willing to volunteer for such a role. Within days, many exhibitors conclude that the vets must be, in the words of one senior judge, 'animal rights people [...] against pedigree dogs and looking for any excuse to fail them.' In the end, however, most breeders are in agreement that it matters not whether the

vets involved are friends or enemies of pedigree dogs. In the show-world, the bottom line is simple: the opinion of a vet should not be worth more than the opinion of an experienced dog show judge.

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This chapter opens a discussion about the relationship between pedigree dog breeding and veterinary science, and the divergent concepts of health to which the two practices relate. Here, I trace the consequences of the fact that some features of breed-specific anatomy are viewed as natural and normal in the show-ring yet unnatural and pathological in the veterinary clinic. Drawing on the ideas of Ludwig Wittgenstein (2009 [1953]) and J. L. Austin (1961), I argue that conflicts between breeders and vets relate to their divergent use of 'ordinary language' – in particular, the use of the words 'dog' and 'health' – to mean quite different things. I suggest that show-breeders and their veterinary critics are not merely prioritising different aspects of a shared epistemology, but rather that they are working within conceptual systems that are fundamentally different.

As I have discussed in previous chapters, breeders and critics alike endorse the Kennel Club's view that a healthy pedigree dog will be 'fit for function', although opinions differ as to what constitutes health and fitness, or indeed as the primary function of a pedigree dog. In a debate which brings to mind Georges Canguilhem's (1989 [1966]) observation that health is signified by an organism's capacity to meet the demands of its milieu, critics, along with the Kennel Club, argue that the primary function of most dogs today is that of companion animal. As such, pedigree dogs should be bred with minimal exaggeration, and individual health and general soundness should be the priority. While those in the show world agree with the importance of health and general soundness, many among them – particularly long-standing, well-established breeders and judges – argue that the primary function of any breed is and always will be that for which it was originally developed. A dog's suitability to fulfil this role – determined by the animal's proximity to its Breed Standard – is, in the view of breeders, the primary

measure of health. In short, show-world concepts of health focus not on the dog as an individual companion but on the *pedigree* dog as a member of its breed. Veterinary medical understandings, meanwhile, are similar to show-world notions of health only in that they, too, refer to standardised images presented in textbooks and teaching materials, yet in the vets' case this is to say that health is generally taken to refer to the absence of what is considered pathology. The conflict, as will become clear in the course of this chapter, is that many of the breed-specific features which breeders deem vital to the health and wellbeing of pedigree dogs *as members of their breeds* are considered pathological by vets.

It is not, then, divergent understandings and interpretations of words alone which produce friction between show-breeders and vets. In this chapter, I argue that is also the 'ordinary language' of animal bodies which speak to breeders and vets in fundamentally different ways. Drawing on Adam Reed's work on ethics and responsibility in animal welfare (2015, 2016), I argue that, in both the show-world and veterinary practice, the physical presence and condition of animal bodies provoke responses as living materials and as emitters of 'evidential signs' (Reed, 2016:110). And while breed-specific features and variation between breeds are seen by breeders as positive traits to be celebrated in the show-ring, it seems that few vets share the show-world's appreciation for the haw, shortened muzzles, large heads, profuse skin wrinkles, and hobbled gaits which breeders have spent decades cultivating and maintaining.

Yet while show-world and veterinary standards of health directly contradict one another, breeders and vets are equally committed to their respective responsibilities of ensuring that pedigree dogs are in a state of 'good health', as they understand the term. This chapter is thus also about responsibility. In it, I primarily use 'responsibility' to refer to the felt imperative of fulfilling one's duty and obligation, although I remain mindful of Haraway's (2008) extension of the term to encompass the relationally-contingent ability to respond to the needs of objects of significance, be they dogs or breeds. Here, I examine the different ways in which breeders and vets take responsibility for pedigree dogs as they see and

know them; in the breeders' case, as members of breeds, and in the vets' case, as individual dogs. Tying the issue to the question of ordinary language use, and to the ethics of animal-care practices, I argue that the responsibilities which breeders and vets observe correspond with their practice-specific concepts of health and care, and, ultimately, to their different concepts of the 'dog'. Whether it be a case of breeders critiquing veterinary practice or vets critiquing show-world practice, divergent understandings of canine health and wellbeing inevitably result in the perspective that responsibilities of care are not being fulfilled on both sides.

When it comes to the role of the Kennel Club, the link between responsibility and authority comes to the fore, and the ethnographic examples in this chapter highlight some of the ways in which authority and responsibility are jointly contested in show-world practice. As the opening vignette has already suggested, the Kennel Club's staff are often at pains to point out how little authority and responsibility the organisation actually holds over breeders' practices. Arguably, such claims about its inability to introduce change against the will of its members are made in the hope that they might exempt the Kennel Club – or at least the Kennel Club's management – from responsibility for the breeding of unhealthy dogs. Yet while the organisation frequently defers responsibility for breeders' actions by pointing at its limited power, it nonetheless holds enough authority to sanction vets to do their bidding by holding breeders to account in the show-ring. This interplay between Kennel Club, show-world, and veterinary authority is significant in this chapter, which traces the ways in which various actors struggle to assert the authority of their own practices based on their supposed abilities to best observe and respond to the needs of pedigree dogs.

Show-ring debates about the afore-mentioned veterinary checks not only raise the question of who has the ability to care, but also who has the moral authority to decide what counts as good care. Thus, this issue relates to wider questions as to how the ethics of looking at the canine body change when the authority to evaluate the health and wellbeing of a dog switches hands from breeders to vets.



Based on the understanding that ‘different *practices of looking* yield *different ways of knowing*’ (Grasseni 2007:216, italics as in original), this chapter bolsters the main argument of this thesis; that it is through their caregivers’ engagements in certain skilled, situated practices of care that the health and virtue of canine bodies become apparent. What I wish to add here is that these situated practices of care are also the basis for claims about what counts as responsible breeding practice.

### The High Profile Breeds - a brief history

The story of the High Profile Breeds category and the associated veterinary checks begins long before Crufts 2012. It goes back as far as 1987, when The Council of Europe introduced the *European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals*. The convention, which was informed and widely supported by practitioners of veterinary medicine,<sup>124</sup> aimed to improve the welfare of all pet animals across Europe but gave particular attention to welfare issues among dogs. Section five of this original convention includes a section on breeding, which states that:

‘Any person who selects a pet animal for breeding shall be responsible for having regard to the anatomical, physiological and behavioural characteristics which are likely to put at risk the health and welfare of either the offspring or the female parent.’<sup>125</sup>

Eight years later, in 1995, the original convention was reviewed and updated, drawing further attention to ‘the development of extreme characteristics detrimental to the health and welfare of the animals,’ which, the commission concludes, are ‘related for a large part to the way breeding standards are

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<sup>124</sup> The convention was supported by, among others, the World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA), a global umbrella organisation which counts 96 national and international veterinary organisations among its members. <http://www.wsava.org/> [accessed 14/06/2014]

<sup>125</sup> *European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals* (1987) <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/125.htm> [accessed 26/05/2014]

formulated and interpreted.’<sup>126</sup> Aiming to address these continuing problems, the update includes a directive that breeding associations such as the Kennel Club should ‘reconsider breed standards in order, if appropriate, to amend those that can cause potential welfare problems.’<sup>127</sup> Over 40 breeds are specifically named in the review as being affected by one or more problems, including abnormal positioning of the legs leading to joint degeneration; entropion and ectropion leading to irritation of the eyes; large, protruding eyeballs leading to irritation and prolapse; very long ears leading to injury; markedly folded skin leading to skin disease; a persistent fontanelle – or ‘soft spot’ in the skull – leading to brain damage.<sup>128</sup> If changing these problematic Breed Standards does not prove effective, the commission suggests, it might then be necessary to:

‘consider the possibility of prohibiting the breeding and for phasing out the exhibition and the selling of certain types or breeds when characteristics of these animals correspond to harmful defects.’<sup>129</sup>

In short, the convention was asking breeding associations like the Kennel Club to reconsider the show-world concepts of health to which they had previously subscribed. Despite the fact that the UK is not a signatory of the European Convention, the Kennel Club management was, in the words of its then Chairman, ‘concerned by the influence that the Council of Europe was able to bring upon individual European Union Member State Governments.’<sup>130</sup> On the basis that it needed to safeguard the controversial breeds, the Kennel Club decided to take action and, in 2002, formed what has since become known as the *Breed Health and Welfare Strategy Group* (henceforth the BHWS Group), an advisory board

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<sup>126</sup> *Multilateral Consultation of Parties to the European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals* (1995) ‘Resolution on the Breeding of Pet Animals.’  
[http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/PDF/125\\_Resolution\\_10-03-1995\\_ENG.pdf](http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/PDF/125_Resolution_10-03-1995_ENG.pdf)  
[accessed 26/05.2014]

<sup>127</sup> *Multilateral Consultation of Parties to the European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals* (1995) (ibid.)

<sup>128</sup> *Multilateral Consultation of Parties to the European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals* (1995) (ibid.)

<sup>129</sup> *Multilateral Consultation of Parties to the European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals* (1995) (ibid.)

<sup>130</sup> Irving, R. (N.D.) ‘The High Profile Breeds: where is all began.’ *Our Dogs*  
<https://www.ourdogs.co.uk/highprofilebreeds/> [accessed 17/12/2014]

made up of experts in the field of veterinary medicine and genetic health.<sup>131</sup> After conducting studies of all the breeds on the Kennel Club's register, the group narrowed its focus to those which were later termed the High Profile Breeds – eight of which were specifically mentioned in the European Convention, and seven others which the group felt were also suffering from problems that urgently needed to be addressed.<sup>132</sup> Members of the BHWS Group continue to meet regularly with representatives from each of these 15 breeds to encourage improvements in conformation and discuss the best ways to achieve these goals.

In the wake of the BBC's 2008 documentary, *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*, the Kennel Club came under significant pressure from the British Government, veterinary experts, animal welfare agencies, and the general public. Soon, the Kennel Club stepped up its efforts to improve pedigree dog health; that is, to bring the bodies of pedigree dogs into line with veterinary ideals. Veterinary experts were called in to oversee an extensive review of Breed Standards, many of which were revised to remove words and phrases which might encourage exaggeration. In 2009, new rules were introduced allowing dog show judges to expel from the show-ring dogs which appear to be unhealthy, and to seek veterinary advice if they are unsure whether a dog is fit to compete. However, it seems that not all judges were willing to eschew show-world standards of health. As the then Chairman of the Kennel Club observed, despite the increased focus on health, 'a few judges in some breeds simply can't or won't accept the need to eliminate from top awards dogs which are visibly unhealthy.'<sup>133</sup>

The Kennel Club now presents itself as caught between two conflicting ideologies: many of the organisation's senior management and advisory staff are

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<sup>131</sup> Kennel Club Dog Health Group (2010) 'Annual Report 2010' <http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/173993/doghealthgroupannualreport2010.pdf> [accessed 04/10/2015]

<sup>132</sup> Irving, R. (N.D.) (Ibid.)

<sup>133</sup> Kennel Club Press Office (06/01/2011) Quoting Irving, R. in 'Vet checks for High Profile Breeds at Crufts 2012 and Championship Shows Thereafter.' *Crufts* <http://www.crufts.org.uk/news/vet-checks-high-profile-breeds-crufts-2012-and-championship-shows-thereafter> [accessed 27/05/2014]

recognised experts in veterinary science and medicine who ascribe to veterinary concepts of canine health, but the club's 1200-plus membership which votes on policy is almost exclusively made up of an older generation of show-breeder, many of whom hold 'traditional' ideas about health, dog breeding practice, and the 'proper' relationship between breeders and veterinary science. Despite internal opposition, however, the Kennel Club followed the advice of the BHWS Group and in January 2011 announced that it would be introducing veterinary checks for the High Profile Breeds at General and Group Championship Shows:

'in order to ensure that the fifteen High Profile Breeds, some of which suffer from health issues and which attract the greatest criticism, do not bring the whole hobby of dog showing into disrepute.'<sup>134</sup>

It was decided that the vet checks would officially be introduced at the Kennel Club's own annual show, Crufts. Where better, after all, to introduce measures designed to reassure onlookers that the Kennel Club is taking veterinary health concerns seriously – and fulfilling its responsibilities accordingly – than at the biggest, most public event in the dog showing calendar?

### The Canine Alliance

Unfortunately for the Kennel Club, few breeders or exhibitors seem to agree with this rationale. Before Crufts 2012 comes to a close, a group entitled *Exhibitor's Choice and Voice* (henceforth, EC&V) is set up on Facebook. Supporters of the High Profile Breeds flock to the page to vent their anger, and within 48 hours the group amasses over 5,000 members who all demand action. While some exhibitors whose dogs have failed their veterinary check talk about taking individual legal action against the Kennel Club, others deem it necessary to coordinate a collective response. In the week following Crufts, 320 breeders and exhibitors attend a meeting held in a venue adjacent to the NEC in Birmingham. The majority of those in attendance are prominent judges, long-time breeders, and well-known 'faces' in dog showing. Those who lead the meeting – recordings of which are soon

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<sup>134</sup> Kennel Club Press Office (06/01/2011) (Ibid.)

posted on YouTube – are also members of the show-world elite; judges, breeders and professional handlers, many aligned with the weekly newspaper *Dog World*. An internationally renowned judge – also a consultant editor of *Dog World* and a well-known critic of the Kennel Club – opens proceedings, asserting that there are three main points of contention:

‘One, not all breeds are being treated equally. Two, there has been great criticism of the actual veterinary examination at Crufts, several of those involved feeling that the inspection was far more aggressive than we had been assured. Three, by withholding the Best of Breed awards from dogs who had been judged by some of the country’s best respected and experienced judges on the opinion of one veterinary surgeon, this undermines the whole judging process in this country.’<sup>135</sup>

Attendees elaborate on these points during the course of the meeting, one audience member claiming that the checks have caused ‘confusion, mayhem, tremendous anguish, and, to all those involved, absolute trauma’. Having spoken to the owners of one of the disqualified dogs, this same gentleman reports that:

‘Their lives have been utterly devastated by their experience [...] they feel they are living through a nightmare. They feel humiliated. They feel ashamed. Their only crime is that for a number of years they have bred fit, healthy, sound dogs of good temperament without exaggeration. The latest example is that they bred the recent Best in Show winner at Westminster [the biggest dog show in the USA].’<sup>136</sup>

In short, they have lived up to their responsibilities as ‘good breeders’, engaging in established practices to produce dogs which were – as they understood things – fit and healthy, and until recently approved of and indeed celebrated by the Kennel Club. How can a dog that has previously been awarded such high honours in the show-ring suddenly be labelled unhealthy, other audience members ask. They point out that many of the other disqualified dogs have also won prizes at

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<sup>135</sup> Brace, A. (2012) See: *Canine Alliance – Post Crufts Meeting – Part 1*.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ov\\_gQkHOp4E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ov_gQkHOp4E) [accessed 14/02/2013].

<sup>136</sup> See *Canine Alliance – Post Crufts Meeting – Part 1*.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ov\\_gQkHOp4E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ov_gQkHOp4E) [accessed 14/02/2013].

the world's top dog shows, which must surely prove that the vets got it wrong at Crufts, not the exhibitors and judges. The same breeder goes on to claim that the owners of disqualified dogs are, 'like many others ... so worried about the sport they love and the breed they have served so well.' In closing, he asks, 'what support is the Kennel Club providing to those that have been traumatised by such a dreadful action?'<sup>137</sup> The audience are in agreement; the Kennel Club has neglected its responsibilities to ensure the wellbeing of breeders and support them in their long-standing show-world practice of breeding healthy, Standard-fitting dogs.

Before the post-Crufts meeting draws to a close, attendees vote to set up a pressure group, formally to be known as the *Canine Alliance*,<sup>138</sup> which will stand-up for the rights of exhibitors and try to put an end to the vet checks. A committee of well-known members of the dog showing fraternity is elected to lead the new organisation. It is decided that donations and membership fees will fund a campaign to bring an end to the vet checks and fight other perceived injustices imposed on breeders, exhibitors, and judges of pedigree dogs.

### Normal vs Pathological in the Pedigree Dog World

'I don't see how we can carry on after this,' Pug breeder Mabel sighs as she closes the screen of her laptop. A week on from Crufts 2012, Mabel has spent most of the afternoon sitting at her kitchen table, providing me with a running commentary of unfolding discussions on the *Exhibitor's Choice and Voice* Facebook group and replaying video clips of events at Crufts. Throughout the show-world, mutiny is in the air: like many of her peers, Mabel is declaring that she will boycott future shows if the vet checks continue. Crufts this year, she tells me, has been 'a horrendous ordeal'. She claims to be 'truly thankful' that neither

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<sup>137</sup> See *Canine Alliance – Post Crufts Meeting – Part 1*. (ibid.)

<sup>138</sup> Although it was never acknowledged in my presence, the name *Canine Alliance* is notably similar to that of the *Countryside Alliance*, the group set up in opposition to government-imposed restrictions on hunting, restrictions which are seen by members of the Countryside Alliance as state and urban encroachment into rural life.

of the Pugs she entered in the show were selected as winners and subjected to a vet check. Her relief, she adds, is not down to her awareness of health problems in her dogs but to the fact that she thinks the vets 'had no idea what they were looking at,' when they examined the Crufts winners. Like many of her peers, Mabel feels that one of the major problems with the veterinary checks is that vets – and now, apparently, the Kennel Club – classify breed-defining conformational features as 'defects'.

Mabel's anger is easy to understand. In its own directives, the Kennel Club instructed the vets who carried out the health-checks at Crufts to penalise dogs displaying physical features which were, until recently, expressly called for in the Kennel Club's own Breed Standards.<sup>139</sup> The wording of all Breed Standards has been revised since the controversy of *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*, but Mabel, along with many others in the show-world, disagrees with these changes. While some of her peers argue that breeders simply need more time to bring long-established breeds in to line with the newly-revised Standards, others – Mabel among them – simply refuse to alter their breeding and judging practices to comply with what one senior judge refers to as 'political correctness gone mad'. According to Mabel:

'We breeders have a responsibility to make sure we do our best for the breed. Even if the Kennel Club don't have the backbone to stand up for pedigree dogs, we do.'

The revisions made to Breed Standards, she argues, are a disservice to the history of these breeds, which developed in line with important and noble traditions. What is more, Mabel explains:

'Many of us have been breeding dogs to the old Standards for most of our lives. You're talking about people who have been in these breeds for perhaps 40 or 50 years. It has been their life's work. And now, just because of one completely biased television programme [*Pedigree Dogs Exposed*], suddenly they are told everything they have worked all these years to achieve is worthless, and their dogs are not the right

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<sup>139</sup> Kennel Club (2012) <http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/activities/dog-showing/already-involved-in-dog-showing/high-profile-breeds/> [retrieved 11/03/2012]

‘type’ anymore ... For years, decades, we’ve done what we were told was the right thing to do, only to have it thrown back in our face.’

Whatever the Breed Standards now say, Mabel – like other breeders – insists that those who truly know their breeds understand that the contested features are crucial to the dogs’ fitness to perform their original, intended functions. ‘Basset Hounds *need* long ears,’ Mabel stresses ‘they’re meant to be that way – they ... curl up when the dog is moving and help move scent [from the ground] up towards the nose.’ Likewise, she insists, the deep wrinkles and prominent under-bite of the Bulldog are also necessary for the dogs to function properly; they are important features which channel blood away from the nose, enabling the dogs to cling on to the flesh of bulls. What is more:

‘No matter what anyone tells you, Clumbers [Spaniels] and Bassets and all those breeds – they should have visible haw. If I were judging Bassets and a dog didn’t have any haw, I would penalise that.’

As breeders like Mabel see it, drooping lower eyelids and exposed membranes below the eyeball – commonly known in the show-world as ‘haw’ – promote the work potential and well-being of these dogs. The common understanding is that dogs bred to work, hunt, track, or retrieve are likely to collect grit or dirt in their eyes when involved in these jobs. As Mabel explains, Basset Hounds and Clumber Spaniels ‘have to have haw and an open eye to allow [dirt] to be washed away by tears.’ Until the 2009 review, some Breed Standards explicitly stated that haw is both necessary and desirable. Although the term has now been removed from these descriptions, many breeders still consider haw to be a fundamental feature of their breeds. Even though few show-bred dogs will ever carry out their breeds’ intended task, Mabel argues that adherence to their original Standards is crucial to keep pedigree dogs in good health. It is on this basis that dog show judges justify their decision to continue awarding top show-ring honours to dogs who display prominent haw.

Veterinary literature and teachings, on the other hand, include this gaping of the lower eyelid in descriptions of a condition known as ectropion. And while show-



breeders have traditionally selected for 'haw' – or for what is known in some breeds as 'diamond eye' conformation – veterinary medicine treats these features as pathologies, as a result of which:

'affected animals cannot blink effectively and suffer pain as well as secondary conjunctival and corneal problems' (Crispin, 2011)

When the vet checks are introduced in 2012, instructions given to veterinarians by the Kennel Club state that:

'ectropion or entropion [the turning outwards or inwards of the eyelid] are considered to be conformational defects that are disqualifying signs.'<sup>140</sup>



*Figure 22: An example of so-called 'Diamond Eye' conformation, with notable ectropion and entropion, or 'haw'. As Professor Sheila Crispin, a specialist in veterinary ophthalmology notes, this is, 'a trait that has been selected for in various large breeds of dog such as the St Bernard (illustrated)' (quote and photo from Crispin, 2003).*

It is not, then, merely the meaning of common terms that breeders and vets disagree on; it is also the meaning of specific physical features which, like haw, can be viewed as evidence of good breed-type in the show-ring and as

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<sup>140</sup> Kennel Club (2012) <http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/activities/dog-showing/already-involved-in-dog-showing/high-profile-breeds/> [retrieved 11/03/2012]

pathological defects five minutes later in the veterinary office. As a breeder and exhibitor of Clumber Spaniels observes at Crufts:

‘If haw is considered to be a disqualifying problem, then they are basically saying that all of these dogs bred in this country over the last 50 years should be disqualified. They are saying that our top breeders who have been in the breed for 40 or 50 years have been breeding defective animals. They are saying the top winning Champions in our breed are incorrect, and our top judges [...] don’t know what they’re doing.’

In the understanding of many breeders and judges, this leaves them at a paradoxical impasse. How can it be that features which have defined their breeds for so long are suddenly being re-cast as pathological? What is more, even though Breed Standards have recently been revised to exclude the word ‘haw’, many breeders feel that the appearance of some of the dogs disqualified at Crufts actually complies with the newly-revised versions. As a Basset Hound breeder argues, even if the wording of Breed Standards has been changed, the effect is still the same in that:

‘The new [Breed] Standard for the Basset still specifies a ‘lozenge-shaped’ eye ... but you can’t have a lozenge-shaped eye without some haw.’

The point is raised at the Canine Alliance’s inaugural meeting, where the owner of the Basset Hound which failed the Crufts vet check argues that:

‘The main reason my dog failed that examination was that he was bred to the Breed Standard. Now, when my husband went into that room, that vet said to him, ‘I am judging this dog as a dog, not as a Basset Hound.’

The revelation is been met with laughter from members of the audience, who are apparently amused by the vet’s misunderstanding of the show-world endeavour. After all, the animals who make it into the show-ring at Crufts are far from just ‘dogs’. These are expertly-bred and presented pedigree dogs, made to matter as

material entities through their breeder's skilled cultivation of connections to the ancestors in their pedigrees, to the people, places, and practices in their breed histories, and – most significant in this case – to images of idealised breed-specimens as described in Breed Standards. As the meeting returns to order, the speaker goes on to make a point which resonates deeply with Mabel, as indeed with many of her fellow breeders and exhibitors I will speak with in coming months: 'If the Breed Standard isn't there,' the Basset owner suggests, 'if it truly is unimportant to the vet, then there is no point in us all doing this.'<sup>141</sup>



Figure 23: The Basset Hound that failed the Crufts 2012 vet check.<sup>142</sup>

### Press Hostility

Although historical accounts suggest that the discord between vets and pedigree dog breeders is nothing new (see Hodgman, 1961, 1963; Frankling, 1963; Stockman, 1984), tensions have apparently reached an all-time high. In 2013, *Dog World* newspaper quotes a prominent breeder as:

'saddened that so much media involvement is given to what vets think of dog breeders and dog breeding. We would never pontificate on veterinary matters, this is not our field. How many of the vets who

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<sup>141</sup> See *Canine Alliance – Post Crufts Meeting – Part 1* (Ibid.)

<sup>142</sup> Photo from *Pedigree Dogs Exposed: The blog*. (09/03/2013) 'Breeding Better Bassets.' [http://pedigreedogsexposed.blogspot.co.uk/2013\\_03\\_01\\_archive.html](http://pedigreedogsexposed.blogspot.co.uk/2013_03_01_archive.html) [Retrieved 03/06/2016].

judge breeders on how they produce puppies know intricately the dogs in the pedigrees that breeders study, before a mating, as good breeders do?’<sup>143</sup>

Many of today’s long-standing breeders and judges agree; vets simply do not have the relevant practical skills and expert knowledge to justify their involvement in the breeding – or the judging – of pedigree dogs. Even senior Kennel Club staff suggest that vets are failing to recognise the expertise of breeders or listen to their opinions. As one senior official at the Kennel Club tells me:

‘I’ve had dogs for over 35 years and it gets right up my nose when I take a dog to a vet who looks like he’s just out of nappies and he doesn’t listen and doesn’t have the grace to apologise when it turns out I was right about what the problem was.’

Ideally, he says:

‘vets should see breeders as a source of knowledge. I know far more about my breed than the average vet does. Vets should see breeders’ contributions as advantageous.’

Vets, in other words, should respect the virtue of show-world concepts of health, and should be willing to defer to breeder’s expertise. Yet relations have not always been as tense as they are now, many breeders agree. The show-world at large is characterised by a wide-spread nostalgia for ‘the good old days’ when, as one *Dog World* columnist remembers:

‘vets listened to the old breeders, accepting the fact that they probably knew more about their breed than the vet did, and the breeder-vet relationship was one of mutual respect.’<sup>144</sup>

In other words, relations between the practices of veterinary medicine and pedigree dog breeding are believed to have been much better when vets refrained from commenting on either the practical or moral aspects of dog breeding.

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<sup>143</sup>Top Breeder: Gunalt. Interview by K. Rushby. (March 2013) *Dogs in Focus*. Printed by *Our Dogs* newspaper.

<sup>144</sup> Brace, A. (01/02/2013) ‘Going Around: the Value of Mentoring’. In *Dog World*. P.10

Conversely, the extensive involvement of vets in show-world practice and governance means that those breeders who reject veterinary expertise find resistance increasingly difficult. Thanks to the divergence between show-world and veterinary understandings of health, every encounter between breeders and vets holds potential for disagreement and intense contests for power and authority. Every veterinary assessment of a pedigree dog is, in effect, a commentary on the ethical virtue and the virtuosity of show-world practices, and on breeders' abilities and willingness to fulfil their responsibilities to care for their dogs. The fact that breeders refer to a different concept of health than that against which vets make their diagnosis inevitably means that show-world practices are often seen to be far from good care.

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### The View from (a) Veterinary Practice

'Where did you get her?' vet Lucy asks as she peers at the eyes of a small, brown puppy. It is mid-morning in the summer of 2012, and Lucy is half-way through a clinic. The waiting room of the large, state-of-the art veterinary centre is crowded with owners and animals, but the heavy doors of the consulting room stifle the ongoing barks and squeals outside. In the calm of the room, Lucy's blue scrubs and the shiny stethoscope around her neck match the grey-blue walls and the steel surfaces, and thus create a marked contrast with the comparatively disordered appearance and manner of the woman across the table from her, a woman who suddenly stands to attention as Lucy questions the origin of the puppy. 'She's from a breeder in the Midlands,' the woman replies. After a pause, she adds that the breeder is 'very experienced' and that she decided to buy from her because 'we wanted a dog that would be good with the kids, and [this breeder's] puppies are all brought up with kids in the house.' Lucy doesn't take her eyes off the puppy. 'Hmmm.' Visibly nervous, the woman presses on: 'And her dogs are all show winners. [This puppy's] grandfather won at Crufts.' Lucy is now

examining the puppy's eyes. 'Hmmm,' she repeats, this time with a distinct frown on her face. Eventually, she looks up at the dog's owner:

'I'm concerned about her eyes. She's showing signs of a condition we call entropion, where the eyelids curl in on themselves and cause pain and ulceration to the eye. We see it a lot in Shar Pei. The usual procedure in a puppy this age is a minor operation where we put the puppy under anaesthetic and tack the eyelids with stitches to stop them curling under ... We'll need to replace the stitches as the puppy grows. We'll have a look when she gets to 10 months or so and think about whether we need to do a corrective surgery. Sometimes the tacks are enough and the problem solves itself, but the surgery is certainly something we'll have to bear in mind.'

Having explained the procedure, Lucy pauses and waits for her client to respond. The woman stands biting her fingernails for a moment or two before nervously telling the vet that, 'The breeder said you'd say that.' Lucy frowns once more as the woman continues, the slight tremor in her voice communicating her discomfort:

'[The breeder] said vets think Shar Pei all have eye disease. She said she'd checked [the puppy's] eyes and they're fine, it's how the breed is supposed to be, and that we're to check with her before we let you do anything to [the puppy].'

Lucy replies:

'You can talk it over with [the breeder], of course, but this puppy definitely has entropion ... talk to the breeder, but I'd like to get [the puppy's] eyes tacked as soon as possible.'

Promising to be in touch later in the day, the woman leaves with the young puppy and Lucy sets about disinfecting the consulting table and instruments before she summons the next patient. 20 minutes later, a message is delivered from reception to say that the puppy's owner is back in the waiting room and has spoken to the breeder. Lucy steps out between consultations to find out that the breeder is still insisting the puppy's eye-lid anatomy is a sign of good breeding,

rather than pathology. The breeder claims she checked the previous day when the owner came to collect the puppy, and is confident that the puppy's eyes are in keeping with what is considered normal for the breed. Her instructions to the puppy's owner are that she should refuse Lucy's advice and instead take the puppy to a particular vet well-known among Shar Pei breeders; a sympathetic expert who appreciates the nuances of the breed.

Lucy's encounter with the Shar Pei and her owner encapsulates the frustrations regularly expressed by both breeders and vets when reflecting on relations between their respective practices. What is more, it demonstrates the very different responses that 'breed-typical' features evoke from breeders and vets. As is often the case, the breeder views the contested features as 'good type'. Accordingly, she sees it as her responsibility to ensure the puppy's wrinkled eyelids are preserved and protected. Lucy, on the other-hand, views the heavy wrinkles as pathological and sees it as her responsibility to intervene. 'It's so frustrating,' Lucy sighs as she flops into a chair in the staff room:

'You saw how that woman was. It was obvious the breeder had primed her, told her that vets would cause problems. And too right – that puppy was obviously going to have issues. I can't see why anyone would think heavy wrinkles like that are a good thing. It's just asking for trouble.'

The issue isn't that the puppy was necessarily in pain or suffering as a result of its heavy skin folds, Lucy confirms. Although no secondary pathology was apparent, and although the puppy was not displaying signs of discomfort, she argues that:

'with a dog – or, I should say, a breed – that has become so extreme, you have to expect that there will be problems. The way I see it, the way I've been taught to see it, is that, if there is a chance that the animal is suffering, or will suffer in the near future, then we have a duty to limit that suffering; ideally, to prevent it before it starts.'

The requirements of the Breed Standard should not come into discussions about health, Lucy argues. Her responsibility, as she sees it, is to the dog – not to the breed, the specific characteristics of which, she feels, are a threat to the wellbeing of its individual members. She explains that:

‘To me, it’s not just a case of the dog getting by without displaying obvious signs of secondary infection or disease. It’s about saying: no – it’s not OK that this dog has such pronounced skin folds, and it’s not OK that the dog’s eyelashes are in contact with the eye. Some people might say it’s not a problem if there’s no evident pathology – no ulceration, no infection – but to me, that skin, those eyelids, that *is* pathology. There’s nothing *secondary* about it.’

Lucy’s comments speak to a long-standing debate between breeders and vets as to whether features should be classed as normal or pathological – and what counts as health or disease – in pedigree dogs. With the introduction of the vet checks, the Kennel Club has become a central figure in this debate. While the organisation’s veterinary guidelines class features such as entropion and ectropion as ‘conformational defects that are disqualifying signs,’<sup>145</sup> supporters of the High Profile Breeds argue that these features are not, in themselves, pathological. Rather, breeders argue, these features are normal and necessary if the dogs are to be capable of fulfilling their original function and thus constitute fit and healthy members of their breeds. In Lucy’s view, breeders’ refusal to accept that entropion and ectropion are pathologies signals a refusal – or even, she suggests, an inability – to take responsibility for the wellbeing of their dogs. With an exasperated sigh, she observes that:

‘Someone once said to me that “there’s no such thing as a responsible Pekingese breeder.” The point is: you can’t continue to breed dogs with severe health problems and call yourself responsible. Given the

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<sup>145</sup> Kennel Club (2012) <http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/activities/dog-showing/already-involved-in-dog-showing/high-profile-breeds/> [retrieved 11/03/2012]



number of problems we see, I think I'd probably say the same about Shar Pei breeders.'

Few vets, it seems, are convinced by breeders' arguments that controversial features are necessary for the health of dogs as breed-members. Again it turns out that notions of responsibility are not absolute and shared by breeders and vets, but rather contingent on the underlying concepts of health which inform their practice. Five days after Crufts 2012 has drawn to a close, Alison Skipper – one of the two independent vets selected by the Kennel Club to carry out the controversial vet checks on the High Profile Breeds – releases a statement to *Dog World* newspaper, in which she defends her decisions at Crufts and argues that it is:

'all too easy to overlook chronic low-level discomfort, and I think it's undeniable that some breeds are associated with issues of this kind. Dogs that have always had exposed, irritated inner eyelids aren't going to scream with pain or stop eating because their eyes hurt; they don't know any differently, but surely the same dog would have a better quality of life if its eyelids fitted better to the eyeballs.'<sup>146</sup>

Lucy's own arguments echo those put forward by Alison. For one thing, Lucy claims with certainty, not all suffering is made evident by external pathology, and dogs are notoriously good at 'carrying on' when in pain. As she sees the problem:

'Even if the dog doesn't act like they are in pain twenty-four-seven, it doesn't mean that they're not. Dogs are very good at getting on with things. I've seen dogs who present as healthy and then we've opened them up and they're riddled with tumours. Sometimes it's not what the dogs tell us but what our own knowledge and experience tells us that matters.'

Testimonies from vets like Lucy do not only invoke claims to knowledge about the canine body. They also invoke claims to knowledge about the ways in which

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<sup>146</sup> Skipper, A., quoted in *Dog World* (16/03/2012) 'One of Crufts High Profile Vets Speaks Out.' [http://www.dogworld.co.uk/product.php/67384/1/one\\_of\\_crufts\\_high\\_profile\\_check\\_vets\\_speaks\\_out](http://www.dogworld.co.uk/product.php/67384/1/one_of_crufts_high_profile_check_vets_speaks_out) [accessed 22/03/2012].

dogs experience their bodies and thus about the often subtle ways in which the animals make their experiences of illness apparent to their human carers. Vets like Lucy argue that veterinary practice gives them privileged insight; they develop an intimate knowledge of the canine body in various states of health and disease, along with knowledge of the ways in which the presence of disease might – or might not – affect a dog’s behaviour. As Lucy claims, it is vets’ specialised view of the canine body that puts them in a strong position to assess the likelihood that a dog is suffering from low-level pain. Breeders, on the other hand, often stake counter-claims. They suggest that it does not matter that vets have access to a different view of the canine body; veterinary knowledge of bodies – healthy or pathological – does not compare to the experiential knowledge amassed in the course of a life spent in the company of dogs. Rather, breeders argue, the intimacy of daily life in the kennel helps them to develop an intuitive knowledge of their animals, to the extent that they simply *know* when their dogs are unhappy or in pain. When it comes to canine experiences of disease, then, conflicts between breeders and vets centre on the quality and perceived legitimacy of different forms of knowledge, the two of which are rooted in very different forms of practical engagement with dogs. Like breeders, vets see their particular forms of engagement in practices of care as a source of expert knowledge. Also like breeders, vets see these practical engagements as a source of moral authority. In sum, when it comes to the claims which breeders and vets make as to their relations with dogs, members of both professions claim to act in and promote the best interest of the animals, yet their respective claims are based on very different concepts of what a dog is and of how this ‘truth’ can be observed.

The disparate views held by vets and breeders mean that canine bodies have become sites of intense conflict, not only in the veterinary clinic but also – with the introduction of the vet checks – in the show-ring. Any encounter between veterinary medicine and dog breeding seems to highlight the fact that the two practices are fundamentally different in that they relate to two different ways of looking at and interpreting the bodies and behaviours of dogs. Just as breeders argue that vets are intruding into their domains of expertise by entering the

show-ring, vets such as Lucy frequently express their frustration when the competing knowledge claims of pedigree dog-breeders challenge their authority in clinical settings.

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When he hears about my research, Jamie, a senior partner in the practice where Lucy works, is keen to share his own experiences. Jamie is more outspoken than many of his colleagues in veterinary practice, yet fits the mould when it comes to show-breeders' imaginings of the 'typical' vet. For one thing, he is proudly sceptical of pedigree dog-breeding and largely dismissive of breeders' claims to knowledge of the canine body. His seventeen years in practice have led him to conclude that, 'Dog breeders don't like me much, but then again, I don't tend to think much of them.' Not only does Jamie object to show-world breeding practices, he is also annoyed that breeders are, as he puts it:

'constantly telling me how to do my job. It's pretty frustrating to have a breeder bring in a dog who is obviously suffering with entropion, but then to have [the breeder] tell you it's normal for that breed, and *then* tell you that you shouldn't be treating it because the dog is 'fine'.'

Like Lucy, Jamie is adamant that the assessment and diagnosis of disease and discomfort in a dog must not rely on what the two vets see as the unskilled, subjective assessments of lay-people like dog breeders. The task of diagnosing disease, they both agree, requires the clinical expertise of a professional vet. In our first conversation about dog-breeding, Jamie clarifies his own views on the matter:

'I'm not saying what we do as vets isn't largely based on intuition and guesswork. But our 'guesswork' is rooted in a world-class education and years of clinical experience; not just our own experience, but the experience of the profession as a whole. We read the literature, we go to the conferences ... we keep up to date with things. When dog breeders come into our clinic and talk about being 'experts', it really gets my goat.'

When I suggest to Jamie that a dog breeder would likely claim that their own expertise relates to an in-depth knowledge of their breeds, Jamie retorts that:

‘Yes - they might know all sorts of things about how the Mastiff was a fighting dog in ancient Rome, or what-have-you. But sorry – that’s not what’s important when a dog is lying bleeding on the table in front of you.’

Like Lucy, Jamie argues that:

‘None of that stuff matters – none of the specifics of the breed should come into question – when you’re talking about health or welfare. I don’t care why a breeder thinks a Mastiff should have Diamond Eye conformation; eyelids that don’t meet the eyeball correctly are going to cause a dog to suffer, no matter what breed it is.’

In short, Jamie is highly dismissive of the notion that the expertise held by dog breeders can be compared to the expertise held by vets. For one thing, Jamie argues that expertise requires a particular professional objectivity. Dog breeders, as he sees them, are too often distracted by the superficial aspects of their breeds to behave objectively when it comes to caring for individual dogs. As Daston and Galison (2007) observe, objectivity itself has a history, and, crucially, understandings of what constitute objectivity are specific to certain forms of practice. As Daston and Galison note:

‘The criterion may be emotional detachment in one case ... belief in a bedrock reality independent of human observers in yet another’ (Daston & Galison 2007:29).

As I have argued in previous chapters, show-world understandings of what counts as objectivity do not necessarily correspond with veterinary-scientific understandings thereof. Breeder’s accept – and even celebrate – the fact that their interpretations of Breed Standards and the breed ideal are inherently subjective. What is important in the show-world is that breeders are able to make ‘objective’ assessments which are not influenced by their affective relations with either dogs or breed and which meet the needs of both. From a show-world

perspective, vets lack a knowledge of and commitment to breeds which might otherwise help to counter what many breeders see as a problematic veterinary focus on overly simplistic, bio-scientific notions of health.

Like many of his veterinary colleagues, however, Jamie is adamant that dog breeders, owners, and vets are all morally obliged to attend to the health and welfare of canine patients as individual dogs and must not, he insists, alter their practice of care according to the epistemologies associated with specific breeds. In his view, the ethical choices breeders make in allowing or encouraging certain conformational features to develop go against a fundamental moral code which obliges those involved in animal care to fulfil certain duties; foremost among them, to realise and maintain in these animals what veterinary science defines as a state of anatomical, physiological, and behavioural normalcy. In other words, animal care-givers have a moral responsibility to maintain in their animals a state of good health. Yet, as I argue here, exactly what counts as a state of anatomical normalcy or good health remains a contentious issue between breeders and vets.

So I put the question to Jamie which forms of canine life, if any, best represent normalcy and health. His reply is strikingly similar to those offered by others in the veterinary profession:

‘When you look at what happens when dogs are left to their own devices and not selectively bred, the canine body quickly reverts to what I would call a healthy type. I think that tells us something: that nature knows best ... There’s a pretty clear correlation, to my mind, between the rate of pathologies and the divergence from a standard, ‘Heinz 57’ type ... It’s quite simple, really: the further a dog is from what is natural, the more problems you’re going to get.’

While Jamie’s view on what constitutes the ideal canine form diverge significantly from the views of show-breeders, what they do have in common are understandings of nature as both a biological and moral force. In determining what is right and proper in canine bodies, Jamie, much like show-breeders, does something that Adam Reed recognises elsewhere as ‘the work of carefully and

consistently differentiating between the natural and unnatural' (Reed, 2015:5). Like many breeders, the vet suggests that nature shapes the bodies of 'healthy' dogs, thus providing guidance to those who make, re-make, and care for these animals. In short, in both the show-world and the veterinary clinic, nature provides the guidelines to what counts as health and responsible practice, yet to very different ends. Based on their veterinary views of nature and what is 'natural', Jamie and many of his colleagues argue that the anatomy of some breeds is simply too far removed from what is 'normal' for the dogs to be considered healthy. Jamie claims that the body of 'a good working Lab, or a working Border Collie ... or a Jack Russel,' is more appropriate in its physical conformation, in that it is 'bred to survive a life running about outdoors.' Reflecting on her experiences of performing the veterinary checks at Crufts, Alison Skipper seems to agree:

'It is sad that some dogs failed, but I think it shows that there is a need for this scheme; if we had been assessing a group of Borzois or Cairns or Dalmatians I don't think any would have failed.'<sup>147</sup>

Unlike show-breeders, many of whom speak of nature as a force which creates and legitimises physical exaggeration, Jamie and his veterinary colleagues view nature as a force which levels and normalises, and which actively suppresses exaggeration. In 'resisting nature', Jamie claims, breeders are acting unethically. The 'healthy' bodies of crossbred dogs are proof, in his view, that life values and – when given the chance – returns to a generic form. The cultivation of physical anomaly and variation is not perceived to be the act of virtue, as show-breeders claim. In the vets' view, the production of morphological extremes is not a practice of careful improvement, but rather the destruction of nature and a natural ideal.

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<sup>147</sup> Skipper, A., quoted in *Dog World* (16/03/2012) 'One of Crufts High Profile Vets Speaks Out.' [http://www.dogworld.co.uk/product.php/67384/1/one\\_of\\_crufts\\_high\\_profile\\_check\\_vets\\_speaks\\_out](http://www.dogworld.co.uk/product.php/67384/1/one_of_crufts_high_profile_check_vets_speaks_out) [accessed 22/03/2012].

## Conflicts Continue

*First they came for the Pit Bull breeds, but I didn't own one so why care,  
Then they came for the cropped breeds, but I didn't own one so why care,  
Then they came for the docked breeds, but I didn't own one, so why care,  
Then they came for the high profile breeds, but I didn't own one, so why care,  
Then they came for my breed, but no one else cared.*

Anonymous re-working of a statement by German anti-Nazi theologian, Martin Neimoller.  
Posted on the *Exhibitor's Choice and Voice* Facebook page, March 2012, by a supporter of High  
Profile Breeds.

In the weeks following Crufts 2012, the dust gradually settles in the wider show-world. In the High Profile breeds, however, controversy continues to rage and is regularly stirred up by the weekly show-world newspapers, particularly *Dog World* with its pro-Canine Alliance stance. Messages posted on the *Exhibitors' Voice and Choice* Facebook page pour scorn on Jemima Harrison and her *Pedigree Dogs Exposed* documentary. Some see Harrison as wholly responsible for the current situation, while others blame interference from Europe and those behind the *Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals*. Calls for an end to the 'discrimination' against what are now known in the show-world as the 'Highly Persecuted Breeds' continue. Few breeders agree with vets like Alison Skipper who suggests that the 15 breeds have been justly singled-out on the basis of breed-wide problems with extreme conformation. According to many breeders, the vet checks equate to the discrimination of a persecuted minority. Warnings are pronounced that if other exhibitors aren't careful, their breeds will soon be added to the list of High Profile Breeds – a message reinforced by Facebook posts which feature a re-working of Martin Neimoller's poem about the escalating persecution of minority groups in the Nazis' rise to power. Somewhat ironically, in this case the political roles are reversed: the vet check controversy plays out against a background of right-wing, nationalist sentiment that dominates show-world politics. Time and again, the Canine Alliance's campaign to stop the vet checks seems – unwittingly or not – as if it has been specifically designed to evoke

and capitalise on wider anti-foreign and anti-liberal concerns: perceived threats to the integrity and sovereignty of the British nation, threats which are interpreted as due cause to join and indeed precipitate the nation's shift to the right by invoking the alleged duty of citizens to preserve and maintain 'traditional' values and ways of life.



*Figure 24: Canine Alliance Campaign Posters*

In the face of such protests by the Canine Alliance, the Kennel Club remains adamant that the veterinary checks will continue, yet revisions to the club's instructions to vets arguably dissipate the impact of these assessments. Having previously stipulated that some conformational defects are to be considered 'disqualifying signs', the Kennel Club has changed the wording to address the key question of whether extreme conformation should, in itself, count as pathology or whether the presence of secondary pathology is necessary for disqualification. The revised directives specify that:

'A Championship Show veterinary surgeon is not expected to evaluate the dogs for conformational characteristics which are of an aesthetic



nature only, and therefore extreme conformation that is not associated with a clinical symptom capable of affecting health or welfare does not form a basis for preventing a dog from entering the group competition. For example, a dog should not fail the examination because it has a short muzzle, unless there is associated difficulty with respiration; a dog should not fail the examination because it has a roached back, unless there is associated lameness or ataxia.’<sup>148</sup>

The revisions place clear limits on veterinary agency in the show-ring. Aberrant conformational features are not to be considered pathological if they are not causing obvious suffering on the day of the show. In particular, entropion is now only to be considered a disqualifying fault – in other words, to be considered pathological – when ‘the abnormality is sufficiently severe to cause signs of discomfort.’<sup>149</sup> Likewise, ectropion – which many breeders know as ‘haw’, and which caused all that controversy at Crufts 2012 – is only to be considered a problem in cases where:

‘the abnormality is sufficiently severe to be associated with significant reddening, swelling or thickening of the conjunctivae (the delicate membranes which surround the eyeball and cover the inner surface of the eyelids), or other signs of discomfort. This should be visible without need to manipulate the eyelids.’

While many breeders welcome the clarifications, few critics of pedigree dogs seem convinced about the need for change or, indeed, the efficacy of the veterinary checks. Many share vet Lucy’s concerns that some conformational features cause the sort of clinical pathology which will not be evident in a superficial examination. And although Lucy notes that many exaggerations do not necessarily cause clinical problems in every dog, she argues that their proliferation might still lead to widespread suffering in the wider population. The twisted tails of the Bulldog and the Pug, for instance, have been linked with spinal

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<sup>148</sup> *Kennel Club* (2014) ‘Veterinary Surgeon Information.’ [http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/267685/sh102\\_veterinary\\_surgeon\\_information\\_september\\_14.pdf](http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/267685/sh102_veterinary_surgeon_information_september_14.pdf) [accessed 12/09/2014].

<sup>149</sup> *Kennel Club* (2014) ‘Veterinary Surgeon Information.’ [http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/267685/sh102\\_veterinary\\_surgeon\\_information\\_september\\_14.pdf](http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/267685/sh102_veterinary_surgeon_information_september_14.pdf) [accessed 12/09/2014].

defects, and while not all dogs with a twisted tail will suffer from a spinal defect, not all dogs suffering from spinal defects will exhibit clinical signs. Similarly, Lucy's colleague, Jamie, notes that the disproportionately large heads of the Bulldog and French Bulldog – which have long been celebrated in the show-ring – are known to cause significant problems for bitches delivering puppies. So, both vets argue, while screw tails and out-sized heads lead to suffering, this suffering is not in evidence in the show-ring, meaning these exaggerations will not be penalised.

Besides, even though veterinary influence is limited by the Kennel Club's directives, Lucy claims that, if she were carrying out the checks, she would still feel bound by her professional responsibilities. As she understands the situation, the Kennel Club is asking that vets only use *some* of their knowledge, which effectively means that vets are expected to declare a dog 'healthy' even if the animal is fundamentally abnormal in its anatomy. All that matters is that it is not visibly suffering on the day of the examination. These restrictions, Lucy argues, do not allow vets to fulfil their professional duties of care. Similar concerns soon prompt others to suggest that the vet checks are little more than a public relations exercise by the Kennel Club, which may be attending to the public image of dog showing. As many critics argue, however, the Club is failing in its responsibilities to ensure that show-world practices do not compromise the health and welfare of dogs. Writing on her *Pedigree Dogs Exposed* blog, Jemima Harrison, producer of the eponymous BBC documentary, argues that:

'The vet checks are pretty much rubbish, sufficient to pick up lameness or an obvious eye or skin problem, but useless at picking up anything more fundamental, including exercise intolerance due to underlying brachycephalic obstructed airway syndrome. The vets are not allowed to put a stethoscope on the dogs and the dogs only have to trot up and down a few yards. Winning dogs are also often

carried/wheeled from the ring to the vet-check to give them the best chance of a pass.’<sup>150</sup>

Harrison seems to be in agreement with vets like Lucy and Jamie who question the use of the term ‘healthy’ to describe a dog which needs to be wheeled on a trolley from the show-ring to the veterinary office in order to pass a vet check. Yet, like dog show judges, vets are asked by the Kennel Club to assess the dog only from the point at which it arrives in front of them. In the tradition of the show-ring, what happens outside the judge’s ring or the vet’s office is not taken into account. When I raise the issue with breeders, they claim that exhibitors who wheel their dogs to the veterinary office are simply doing their best to fulfil their duties of care to dog and breed. Just as the bodies of dogs are made to fit the images described in their Breed Standards, exhibitors must now ensure that the dogs’ bodies fit a different image; the image of health as described in the Kennel Club’s directives to the veterinary surgeons carrying out the checks. And as long as the appropriate features remain visible or invisible to the vet, the dog – and thus by implication the breeder and judge – will pass the test.

## Conclusion

In 2008, Mark Evans, chief vet at the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, appeared on *Pedigree Dogs Exposed* referring to dog shows as ‘parade[s] of mutants’. Although three-and-a-half years have passed, when the vet checks are introduced in 2012, Evan’s words still sum up how breeders believe all vets view pedigree dogs. Yet despite breeders’ protests, vets have been given the final word on the ultimate honour in breed-level judging – Best of Breed at Crufts. In their newly appointed role, vets are not only assessing the health of the dog; they are also, in effect, assessing whether the dog has been well cared

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<sup>150</sup> Harrison, J. (2013) ‘French Bulldog Removed from the KC’s High Profile List’ <http://pedigreedogsexposed.blogspot.co.uk/search?updated-max=2013-11-23T21:08:00Z&max-results=7&start=7&by-date=false> [Retrieved 19/01/2014].

for, well-bred, and well judged. In other words, they are assessing the virtuosity and moral virtue of the breeder and judge. The vet checks are, then, more than an assessment of the physical bodies of the dogs. They are also an assessment of show-world practices of care. Where disease is observed and dogs are disqualified, formerly show-winning conformational features are suddenly recast as the unhealthy and unnatural consequences of breeders' irresponsible, unethical practice.

In this chapter, I have argued that tensions between show-breeders and vets, which have come to light with the introduction of vet checks, relate to discordant concepts of health at the core of show-world and veterinary practice. As the fall-out of the checks at Crufts 2012 suggests, what counts as a healthy dog in the show-ring is often a far cry from what counts as a healthy dog in the veterinary clinic. Yet as I have argued, what underlies these different views of the canine body is a linguistic confusion which in turn is a symptom of deep-seated conceptual differences, and these, as I hope to have shown, arise from different forms of practical engagement with pedigree dogs. As I have argued here, words like 'health' and 'natural' speak differently to breeders and to vets, but so do the bodies of pedigree dogs. Where a breeder observes Breed-Standard fitting perfection, a vet may observe pathology. Where a breeder attests good health in a dog's overt appearance, a vet may diagnose a secondary pathology not visible to the scientifically untrained eye. The Kennel Club advisor quoted at the beginning of this chapter points to the problem of widespread 'kennel blindness' among show-breeders and claims that 'we need to make breeders see what *we* see when we look at these breeds.' In this case, 'we' refers to the veterinary experts employed by the Kennel Club. The problem for breeders is that their 'blindness' has not always been a problem for the organisation. Until recently, the ability to appreciate the merit of breed-specific features – even in their extreme forms – has been taken as evidence of breeders' virtuosity and skill.

This entire argument, then, relates back to my previous observations about the nature of skilled vision, and the claim that, as Tim Ingold puts it, '*What we see is*

inseparable from *how* we see it, and how we see it is always a function of the practical activity in which we are engaged' (Ingold, 2000:260). The fact is, along with concepts of health and fitness, show-world practices are undergoing change. Yet this change is largely the result of external pressure. In the view of many breeders, resisting the imposition of change is part of the duty of care they have toward their breeds, their communities, and their traditions, and this ethos permeates their practice at every level. After all, in the show-world, responsible pedigree dog-breeding has long been about resisting change and keeping things in stasis. Yet as the community is only too aware, changes made to concepts of health and fitness will inevitably bring with them new notions of responsibility, and these will demand unwelcome adjustments to their practices of care.

Despite their conceptual differences, however, the ethnographic evidence in this chapter suggests that veterinary and dog breeding practice do have a number of things in common. First and foremost, both practices accord central significance to skilled vision, as they predominantly rely on visual assessment to evaluate and diagnose canine bodies. Secondly, breeders and vets both speak of 'healthy' canine bodies to refer to those which appear in their 'natural form', although the breeders' concept of the natural form of the dog differs radically to that held by vets. Thirdly – and relatedly – show-world and veterinary perspectives both essentialise the bodies of pedigree dogs. In the view of most show-breeders, a Standard-fitting pedigree dog is essentially 'good', while the bodies of dogs that fail to comply with Breed Standards cannot be anything but unhealthy in show-world terms. From the point of view of a vet like Jamie, on the other hand, the 'extreme' anatomy of a Bulldog will never be normal or natural, but always and essentially pathological. The question both vets and breeders face, then, is how to reconcile these two opposing concepts of canine health in ways which fulfil both show-world and veterinary responsibilities of care.

## Chapter Six – Testing Disease: Public Secrecy and the Virtue of Ignorance

‘Breeding pedigree dogs has always been about trying to promote good characteristics and eliminate bad characteristics and poor features. But now, recently, we have become much more concerned with health.’

Bill Lambert, Kennel Club Health and Breeder Services Manager  
Speaking at a dog breeding seminar hosted by Crown Vets, Inverness  
24<sup>th</sup> March 2011

It is late September in 2012 and vet Melanie – a specialist in canine reproduction – is having what she calls a ‘bad morning’. Having spent half-an-hour trying to collect semen from a reluctant English Setter, she breaks the news to his hopeful owner that, when examined under a microscope, the little semen she eventually managed to collect suggests that the dog – a well-known Show Champion – is infertile. After a cup of coffee and much consolation, the owner leaves, still in tears, and Melanie and I begin to clean up the consultations room before the next client arrives. ‘Oh crap,’ Melanie exclaims, looking at her diary, ‘I forgot: it’s Camilla next.’

Camilla is a long-time breeder and judge of King Charles Cavalier Spaniels, and a well-known ‘face’ in pedigree dog-breeding circles who has enjoyed a prestigious career in the show-world. Now in her mid-seventies, she is an influential member of several breed club and show-society committees. I had first encountered Camilla three months earlier in another local veterinary clinic – a general practice – where she had brought one of her young female Cavaliers to have a small wound attended to. The vet who treated the bitch also took the chance to check the animal’s heart with the aid of a stethoscope. Camilla was talking to me with her back turned to the vet as he carried out the examination, and was notably taken aback when the vet told her he could detect what sounded like a significant heart murmur which ought to be examined by a cardiologist. Camilla left the surgery soon after without much comment, other than to say she would be in touch ‘later’ to arrange a referral.

So I am somewhat surprised when Camilla arrives at Melanie's clinic with the same young Cavalier bitch, requesting that the animal be artificially inseminated. I am aware that a heart murmur indicates early onset Mitral Valve Disease (MVD), which critical onlookers and a good number of breeders consider to be a widespread and serious problem in Cavaliers. I am also aware that breeding from affected stock is strongly discouraged by the Kennel Club, and explicitly ruled-out by the breed clubs, at least one of which counts Camilla among their most senior committee members. Not sure what to say, I keep quiet while Melanie explains the insemination procedure to Camilla who, it seems, does not recognise me from our previous encounter.<sup>151</sup> As usual, Melanie asks about the patient's health, in particular whether the bitch has undergone the suggested health tests for the breed, including heart testing for MVD and testing for a Syringomyelia, a condition affecting the brain and spine. With a dismissive wave of her hand, Camilla assures the vet that:

'All my dogs are healthy. They all live for a very long time. I've one at home that's nearly 15 years old. There aren't any problems in my lines.'

I have seen other clients fob off questions about health, and know that vet Melanie's options are limited in these situations. Neither the Kennel Club who will register the bitch's puppies, nor the practice owners who employ Melanie, insist that breeding stock be health tested,<sup>152</sup> and the reality of the situation is that, if Melanie calls a halt to the procedure, she will not only risk her good standing in the dog-breeding community; she will also risk her job. After a moment's hesitation, she sets about thawing the frozen semen with which to inseminate the bitch.

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<sup>151</sup> Whether or not this was an act I was unsure.

<sup>152</sup> In this case, the situation was further complicated by the fact that, at the time, the Kennel Club would not knowingly register puppies resulting from the use of artificial insemination except in special circumstances, such as when the stud dog lived outside the UK. The rules have since been relaxed, (see [http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/breeding/breeding-from-your-dog/artificial-insemination-\(ai\)/](http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/breeding/breeding-from-your-dog/artificial-insemination-(ai)/)), but the use of A.I. remains controversial in the show-world, where it is viewed by many as 'unnatural', and potentially damaging to the reproductive abilities of future generations of dogs.

'I don't say this very often, but I hope that bitch doesn't get pregnant,' Melanie sighs as Camilla walks out of the practice reception towards her car. 'You seemed a bit concerned about [the bitch's] heart?' I ask, trying to sound casual.

Melanie didn't miss my intended meaning:

'Yeah, well, it's obvious [Camilla] doesn't have them tested, isn't it? Last time she was in here with another bitch for insemination. I tried to put a stethoscope on the bitch's chest and [Camilla] nearly bit my hand off. She doesn't want to know, or she does know and doesn't want me to ... But what can I do? It's not me who makes the rules; it's the Kennel Club.'

The Kennel Club does indeed make the rules when it comes to the registration of puppies from non-health tested parents. If breeders want their puppies to count as pedigree dogs in the show-world, they must comply with Kennel Club requirements. Yet despite the availability of more than 80 different DNA tests<sup>153</sup> and multiple phenotypic screening programmes for complex inherited disorders, by 2012 only one test – for an inherited immunodeficiency condition in Irish Setters – has been made compulsory by the organisation. In all other cases, it remains up to breeders themselves whether or not to test their stock before mating. And while many breed clubs have Codes of Ethics which specifically state that breeding stock must be health tested, there seem to be few consequences for members who flout the rules. Camilla is certainly not the only high-powered member of a breed club committee who does not health test her dogs.

Despite the Kennel Club's refusal to impose compulsory testing, the view promoted by the organisation since the public scandal of *Pedigree Dogs Exposed* has largely mirrored that of veterinary science; that is, responsible, careful dog breeding involves the use of genetic and phenotypic health screening, and an incorporation of the knowledge these practices produce. Similar to the efforts of

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<sup>153</sup> Laboklin (2013) 'Genetic Diseases in Dogs.'  
<http://www.laboklin.co.uk/laboklin/GeneticDiseases.jsp?catID=DogsGD> [last accessed 12/05/2013]



the American breeders chronicled by Donna Haraway (2008), a number of British show-breeders are, indeed, pioneering substantial attempts to engage with veterinary knowledge and practice in order to identify and eliminate genetic disease. Many other breeders, however, dismiss the suggestion that working to veterinary standards of health can produce good pedigree dogs. Again, my argument here is based on the notion that the practices of vets and show-breeders relate to fundamentally different concepts of canine health; in most breeders' view, a healthy dog is one which fits with the description of the ideal specimen featured in the Breed Standard, while the veterinary view of health focuses on a biomedical model which relates to the health of the dog as an individual, rather than as a member of its breed. In this chapter, I look at how the practices of veterinary health testing produce a specific understanding of the canine body, one informed by standardised measurements very different to those which inform evaluations of pedigree dog health in the show-ring.

In the previous chapter, I argued that these different concepts of health lead to different practices in the show-world and veterinary clinic, and that these different practises in turn lead to different and often conflicting notions of what responsibilities breeders and vets owe to pedigree dogs and their breeds. In this chapter, I consider how show-breeders have responded to the widespread introduction of veterinary health testing schemes, and how the knowledge produced by health tests has affected concepts of health, responsibility, and care. Engaging with James Laidlaw's (2010; 2014) work on ethics and responsibility, I argue that show world concepts of health put breeders in what Laidlaw terms 'particular "agentive" relationship[s]' with both pedigree dogs and breeds. Laidlaw's argument hinges on Bruno Latour's concept of agents as either 'intermediaries', whose agency is merely the extension of the agency of a separate actor, or as 'mediators', who are actors in their own right and can make 'an unpredictable difference in how things go' (Laidlaw, 2015:145, drawing on Latour, 2005). Laidlaw's argument is that agency is always attributed by the observer. Hence, he suggests that the observation of agency is the attribution of responsibility to a thing. On this premise, I examine how show-world and

veterinary concepts of health attribute responsibility for disease: in some cases to breeders, in others to the force of 'nature', both of which are seen as mediators the work of which is manifest in the bodies of dogs. The crux of this argument is that – as long as breeders engage in virtuous forms of skilled breeding practice – they do not believe that responsibility for incidents of disease lies with them but rather with nature. Yet the imposition of veterinary health concepts introduces new notions of responsibility, and a new understanding of the agentive relationship between breeders and dogs. In short, veterinary knowledge offers breeders new information and power to counter nature and thus new opportunities – and responsibilities – to improve the individual dog's health.

Many breeders remain reluctant to engage with veterinary concepts of health and – I argue – with the responsibilities which come with the increased agency to counteract disease. Here, I show how the responsibilities that come with veterinary concepts of health directly compete with those breeders believe to have for their breeds. For one thing, veterinary health testing programmes make incidents of disease public, yet in the show-world the appearance of disease remains highly problematic, and while breeders might not be held responsible for disease, they are nonetheless responsible for keeping it hidden. After all, in the show-world, pedigree dogs are not merely bounded individuals but bloodlines incarnate. Each dog is a living embodiment of its pedigree chart, and social and biological capital flows from the individual into the pedigree and vice versa. One consequence of such 'pedigree thinking', as Mary Bouquet (1993, 1996) might refer to it, is that news of inheritable disease affects not just the identity of the individual dog, but also its relatives, living and dead, and the humans associated with them. Here, I examine how breeders resist and refute responsibility to respond to disease, not only through the maintenance of silence but also – and significantly – through the cultivation of ignorance in response to veterinary knowledge. This discussion will engage with and contribute to a growing body of work in anthropology which, as Mair et al. suggest, recognises ignorance as a highly charged ethical concept:

‘not simply as the absence of knowledge, but also as a substantive historical phenomenon that ... might incorporate certain knowledge, logics, ethics, emotions, and social relationships’ (Mair et al., 2012:3).

Bearing in mind breeders’ claims to a particular form of specialised knowledge of their breeds, I will argue that selective ignorance of veterinary-scientific knowledge has become an ethical virtue in some parts of the show-world, wherein a refusal to engage with veterinary science is promoted as a strategy for the protection and preservation of traditional forms of pedigree dog breeding. Ultimately, I argue that resistance to health testing becomes an ethical responsibility in and of itself, and the refusal to engage in certain schemes which promote veterinary models of health becomes an act of good, responsible care for both dogs and breeds.

Finally, I argue that in many cases show-world categories of inheritable disease are not clearly defined, so that particular conditions may be variously included or excluded from the category of ‘inheritable’ at different times and by different people. Since the moral aspects of a disease change in line with its classification, owning or breeding from dogs with particular diseases becomes more or less of a problem depending on what the official verdict on their particular condition is at any given moment. Yet whether or not a disease is currently considered to be inheritable, breeding from affected animals is by no means unheard of. Hence, this chapter will examine how breeding from ‘diseased’ dogs can, at times, be considered responsible in the context of breeders’ continual struggle to protect and preserve the wellbeing of pedigree dogs and their breeds.

## Health Testing

Veterinary health testing of breeding stock was formally introduced to pedigree dog breeding in 1965 (*Veterinary Record*, 2015). By the early 1960s, the British veterinary profession found itself facing an uncertain future: the rapid proliferation of motorised vehicles had led to a swift decline in the horse populations which had previously been the focus of veterinary care, and attention

was turning to the emergent practice of small animal medicine (Woods & Mathews, 2010; Woods, 2012; Gardiner, 2014). The new focus on companion animals sparked concern about the breeding of pedigree dogs, so much concern in fact that, in 1963, the British Small Animal Veterinary Association held a symposium on inheritable defects and abnormalities (Hodgman, 1963). Following the seminar, the Kennel Club (KC) and British Veterinary Association (BVA) formed a joint committee on pedigree dog health, and two years later the first joint BVA/KC health testing scheme was introduced – dogs could now be x-rayed for defects in the structure of the hip joint and thus reliably examined for a relatively common condition known as hip dysplasia (HD) (Dennis, 1998). The hip dysplasia scheme had initially been designed as a simple pass or fail system, but, as one veterinary specialist involved in later versions of the scheme points out:

‘This simple scheme was of little use to the breeds most in need of HD control (such as the German shepherd dog and Labrador retriever) since the vast majority of dogs fell into the Fail category whether they had mild or very severe HD. Since insufficient dogs were awarded a Pass ... to make up a large enough breeding pool it was necessary to use some Fail dogs for breeding. However, breeders were left without any guidance as to how to select the best of these, many of which had such mild HD that their use in breeding could have been justified. Not surprisingly, this original scheme failed to have much impact on the incidence of HD (Dennis, 1998).’

From the early days of testing, then, responsible breeding – at least as far as many show-breeders are concerned – has involved the use of stock which has failed veterinary health tests.

Uptake of testing was limited in the early years, and it was only after a more complex hip-scoring system was introduced in 1983 that health testing became a relatively common part of breeding practice – well within living memory for many of the breeders I worked with. By 2011, two further assessment schemes had been introduced by the BVA/KC committee: an elbow dysplasia scheme launched in 1998, and an eye health scheme which covers 12 hereditary eye

conditions affecting over 50 breeds.<sup>154</sup> In 2012, a fourth scheme was introduced to assess the MRI scans of dogs scanned for signs of Chiari Malformation and Syringomyelia (CM/SM): malformations of the brain and spine most commonly associated with Cavalier King Charles Spaniels.<sup>155</sup> This is not to say that all breeders accept the need to test their stock – far from it. In all cases, little was known about the mode of transmission, and many breeders either refused to health-test on the basis that good dogs might be unnecessarily cut from breeding programmes, or – if they had already subjected their dogs to testing – refused to exclude dogs with problematic results from their breeding programmes. Yet regardless of whether or not they comply with recommended testing practices, by the time of my research, health testing is challenging the way many breeders think about health and heritability, and this has a notable impact on their understandings of good, responsible breeding practice.

### Health Testing: A Double-Edged Sword

To this day, most breeders have mixed feelings about health tests. Some they see as helpful, yet others as deeply flawed. Meanwhile, breeders who do not breed for the show-world and rely on health testing as a means to ascertain the health status of breeding stock are roundly criticised by show-breeders. As one Labrador breeder from the show-world reports:

‘We have awful problems with puppy farmers in our breed ... They use the health tests as a selling point, and, of course, puppy-buyers think that if it has clear health tests it must be a good dog. But good breeders wouldn’t dream of breeding from a dog just because it’s passed its health tests.’

Health tests are not, after all, a measure of health which carries particular weight among all show-breeders. To some, these tests are merely a means to appease veterinary-minded critics of show-world practice, and in fierce opposition to

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<sup>154</sup> BVA (2011) ‘Eye Scheme.’ <http://www.bva.co.uk/Canine-Health-Schemes/Eye-scheme/> [accessed 11/10/2011]

<sup>155</sup> BVA (2014) ‘Chiari Malformation / Syringomyelia (CM/SM) Scheme.’ <http://www.bva.co.uk/Canine-Health-Schemes/CM-SM-Scheme/> [accessed 14/12/2015]

such publicity stunts, these show-breeders pride themselves on giving priority to traditional, show-world means of evaluating what is 'healthy' and 'good'. In short, as far as most show-breeders are concerned, a clear eye test and a low hip-score are simply not enough to justify breeding from a dog. Breed type, they insist, is far more important. As Morris and Holloway have similarly noted of pedigree livestock breeding practice:

‘The ‘good animal’ from which to breed must look right – it must embody particular qualities – and this visual knowledge cannot be overridden by genetic knowledge’ (Morris & Holloway, 2014:156).

Inevitably, the existence of these different evaluation schemes means that show-world and veterinary concepts of health often lead to tension and conflict, particularly when veterinary assessments involve standardised anatomical parameters of health.

### Standardising Health

One breed in which discord between veterinary and show-world concepts of health has become starkly apparent is the Otterhound. Having expressed an interest in the breed, I am put in contact with a breeder named Jim, who is keen to impress on me the problems that the BVA/KC hip dysplasia scheme have caused in his breed. After a series of long phone calls in which he fills me in on the history of the breed, I am invited to Jim's house to meet him and his hounds. At first, I am surprised by the order and calm; unlike the homes of many other breeders, Jim's house doesn't display obvious sights and smells of a life spent with dogs, although the sound of baying hounds soon provides a clue as to his living arrangement. Jim leads me out into the garden where he keeps his kennels and where a dozen large hounds are now bouncing up and down against the wire mesh, their heads clearing six foot above the ground as they jump. As he opens a kennel door and a large hound rushes out at me, I am suddenly reminded of a telephone conversation in which Jim had mentioned that Otterhounds are not to be bathed unless it is absolutely necessary. As he had told me:

‘The natural oils in the skin condition the coat and make it waterproof, so the dogs can go in the water when they’re hunting otters. If you wash these hounds, it takes all the oils away – strips them out and changes the texture of the coat.’

Although otter-hunting has long since been outlawed, Jim and his fellow breeders feel it is still vital to keep the hounds in working condition, which means refraining from washing their coats. Yet it’s less the sight of the dogs’ coats that jogs my memory than the smell – a strong odour of fish. When I put my hands either side of the hound’s face in an attempt to stop him from jumping up at mine, I feel the oils in the fur, and later, stroking the animal’s back, I notice the sticky grey dirt that gathers on my palms. Even still, it’s not just the smell or the feel that catches me off-guard. Unwittingly my hand recoils when I suddenly become aware of lumps under the animal’s skin and immediately assume them to be some form of cancerous growth. Jim is quick to assure me that the lumps are merely sebaceous cysts, formed when pores or hair follicles become clogged with dirt or oil. As he puts it, they are ‘very common – normal, I mean – for this breed.’ As I look at the saliva-covered jowls of the dog, it also occurs to me that Jim has previously warned me that the hounds have a serious issue with coprophagia – faeces eating – and the thought is enough for me to avoid contact with the animals’ mouths. At a loss as to why Jim has developed such a passion for this slobbery, smelly, dirty, boisterous breed, I’m relieved when he suggests that we take two of the hounds out for a walk.

I’m used to handling large, strong, excitable dogs and feel slightly patronised when Jim chuckles at my claim that I won’t have any problems holding a hound on a lead. But ‘just in case,’ he says, he’ll give me a bitch to walk. I quickly realise I’ve underestimated the Otterhound’s strength when the bitch I’m handed puts her nose to the ground and starts to pull. For the next half hour, I struggle to keep the hound from pulling me over as she chases scent trails around a large woodland at the back of Jim’s property. Jim is keen that I learn to appreciate the specific quality of the Otterhound’s movement, which he calls a ‘shambling gait’.

He explains that this movement tells of the Otterhound's loose hip-joints which enable the dogs to move efficiently in water when hunting for otters.



*Figure 25: Otterhounds.<sup>156</sup>*

By the time we arrive back at their home, I'm happy to return the hounds to the kennel and head inside the house to wash my hands. As we sit down in his living room with a cup of coffee, Jim asks me what I make of the dog's fitness, having seen them 'in action' out and about. I plead ignorance as to the specifics of the breed while Jim rises from his chair and heads over to a cupboard from which he pulls a bundle of x-ray films. Holding one up to the light, he informs me that:

'This is a shot of Misty's hips [referring to the bitch I had just taken out for a walk]. According to the BVA [hip-scoring] scheme, she has hip dysplasia. All Otterhounds do ... Hip dysplasia is what everyone thinks of when they think of this breed, but most breeders agree it's not really a problem.'

Like many other breeds, Otterhound hips are assessed by means of a standardised process which has been in place since the early 1980s (Dennis, 1998). Dogs are usually sedated and x-rayed at a local veterinary surgery and the resultant X-ray plates sent to the British Veterinary Association for analysis by a

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<sup>156</sup> Photo from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ATwo\\_otterhounds.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ATwo_otterhounds.jpg) [Retrieved 16/06/2016].



panel of orthopaedists. Both of the dog's hips are awarded a score from 0 to 53, higher scores indicating higher levels of observed pathology. The scores for the two hips are added together to provide a total score for the dog, and the results are then sent to the dog's owner as well as to the Kennel Club. The organisation keeps a record of the average score for the dogs in each breed, and recommends that only those individuals whose scores fall below their breed average should be bred from. Across the 130 breeds for which hip-sore data has been collected, the average hip-score in the 15 years leading up to 2012 is 13.7. For the Otterhound, the average is 46.7. Between 2008 and 2012, the breed's average increased to 50.6. At the time of writing, each of these figures is the highest on record in any breed. In total, 228 Otterhounds have been assessed, individual scores ranging from a low of 9 to a high of 106, the highest possible score a dog can receive (Kennel Club 2013a).



*Figure 26: Picture from the BVA hip dysplasia scheme pamphlet, showing what the organisation describes as 'normal hips in a Greyhound.' As the pamphlet describes: 'In good hips the femoral head is smoothly rounded and fits tightly and deeply into the acetabulum. The outlines of the bone are clear since there is no secondary osteoarthritis.'*<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> (British Veterinary Association, 2014).



*Figure 27: This second picture from the BVA pamphlet on hip dysplasia shows what the organisation describes as 'Severe hip dysplasia (total score 93).' As the BVA describe it, 'The right hip (on the left of the picture) has slipped out the socket (the acetabulum). This hip has dislocated because the socket is so shallow. The left hip (on the right of the picture) is just in the socket, but the socket is again very shallow and has been completely remodelled. There is more new bone around the left hip joint (osteoarthritis) than around the right.'*<sup>158</sup>

The widespread assumption among critics of pedigree dog breeding is that high hip-scores are the result of negligence, and that the breeders are blind to the differences between the 'average' and the 'correct' state of health. In short, high hip scores are seen as a problem, and one for which breeders are directly responsible. Yet as far as Jim is concerned, this isn't the case for the Otterhound. As in other breeds, Otterhound breeders are skilled enough to reduce pathologies, should the need arise, yet according to their verdict, no action is required here as high hip scores are not viewed as pathological. As Jim explains:

'The thing you have to understand when you look at [hip-scoring] figures is that an Otterhound with a low hip-score doesn't move typically for the breed.'

Jim is keen to remind me that the Otterhound Breed Standard specifies that the dogs should have a 'shambling' gait.<sup>159</sup> And, as he explains, 'an Otterhound with a low hip-score won't shamble.' So, while Jim is happy to take some responsibility for the maintenance of high hip scores, he sees this not as a problem, but rather as an asset.

<sup>158</sup> (British Veterinary Association, 2014).

<sup>159</sup> Kennel Club (2014) 'Otterhound Breed Standard,'

<http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/services/public/breed/standard.aspx?id=1023> [accessed 15/06/2014]

The Otterhound's characteristic movement is understood to be part and parcel of its identity as a working breed, Jim explains. When the hounds hunted otters 'they would have spent most of their working lives in the water,' and therefore 'needed to be able to move well in water, which isn't the same as moving on land.' Despite the fact that otter hunting is now outlawed and the hounds are no longer working animals, Jim's perspective – like that of many of his peers – is that the health of pedigree dogs is relative to the social and material context in which the breed was developed, rather than the one in which the dogs live today. This understanding has encouraged breeders to select dogs with what veterinary science now classifies as abnormal hips, although Jim is adamant that working hounds of the past did not suffer as a result. Rather, he claims:

'when these dogs were working, they would be swimming a lot, building up the supportive tissues around the hip joints, which would have held the hips together when they were walking on land.'

The crucial thing for Otterhound owners today, Jim claims, is to ensure that the dogs are properly exercised in order that their hips – soft tissues and bone – develop as is appropriate for the breed. In his opinion, a detailed knowledge of the breed and its history are important prerequisites to adequately respond to the Otterhound's very specific needs. Responsible care, in other words, requires an engagement with the dogs as a member of its breed, and relies on an understanding that good care for the dog is also good care for the collective. In other words, remaining true to the traditions of the breed maximises the health of the hounds, while ensuring the health and fitness of the individual hounds is the best way of safeguarding that the breed retains its Standard-fitting form.

The problem with the veterinary hip-scoring system, Jim argues, is that vets examine the joints outwith the context of both dog and breed. As he tells me:

'The vets only look at the x-ray of the joint, so they just see one snapshot of the bones. They don't see how the rest of the hip – the muscles and ligaments – how they support the bones so that the dog can move correctly.'

This standardised model of assessment does not do the breed any favours, he claims, because:

‘Vets rarely come across Otterhounds, and when they look at hip-scores, they quite often tell us the hounds should be in wheelchairs. But X-rays tell one story. Experience tells us breeders something different.’

Accordingly, Jim – like many of his peers – argues that hip-scores are, ‘not something we need to take much notice of.’ Rather, a detailed knowledge of the breed and its carefully cultivated idiosyncrasies trumps veterinary knowledge and indeed finds its practice to be both ill-informed and unreliable. As evidence, Jim offers the fact that one of the top hounds ever to be seen in the breed had a hip-score of 98, yet in Jim’s opinion, that paragon of Otterhound virtue stands unrivalled in both its movement and breed type. So, whereas vets see a hip score of 98 as a problem, those devoted to the project of pedigree dog breeding are not necessarily aiming to produce dogs which meet with veterinary standards of health. Typically, breeders work with the innate qualities of the breed to realise a certain kind of health in a very specific kind of body. If they were to adhere to veterinary measures of health, Jim insists, show-breeders could no longer produce true Otterhounds.

### The Consequences of Negative Test Results

Even though breeders don’t always treat inheritable disease with the same concern as veterinary critics, news of disease and problematic health test results are nonetheless morally significant. Certainly, vets often report difficulties in communicating effectively with breeders on the subject of health testing, but sometimes breeders seem to have the same difficulties in trying to communicate with their show-world peers. In most cases, talking about actual instances of disease is taboo. Public knowledge of disease can ruin the career of a show-dog and tarnish the legacy of its breeder and its bloodline. However, I would argue that this is not due to the fact that the appearance of disease itself is viewed with particular scorn. To put it in Latour’s terms (2005), I argue that breeders see

themselves as actors who skilfully channel their agency through dogs' genes and/or bloodlines to create healthy, Standard-fitting pedigree dogs. That said, breeders do not see themselves as the only actors here; they also see nature as an actor which exerts further agency on the bodies of dogs. While skilled breeders are often able to channel the forces of nature into positive results, at times nature simply exerts its agency independently of breeders' efforts. When it does, one unintended consequence can be disease. What makes this partial deference of agency to nature so important is the fact that, as James Laidlaw (2010) notes, every attribution of agency comes with the attribution of responsibility. Simply put, breeders see nature, rather than themselves, as responsible for the inheritable diseases that affect their pedigree dogs.

Yet while nature may be held responsible for disease, it is not disease itself which is seen as the main source of damage in the show-world. Rather, it is *public knowledge of disease* which poses the biggest threat to the wellbeing of pedigree dogs and their breeds. As Veena Das (2015) observes, the fact that an individual's disease could seriously affect the lives of others means that knowledge of disease often comes with the responsibility to remain silent. In the show-world, it is therefore seen as an unwritten – and often unspoken – rule that breeders do their utmost to ensure that incidents of disease do not become public knowledge. Silence on the subject of disease is considered to be a dog breeder's implicit responsibility. After all, show-breeders argue, news of disease provides critics of the show-world with further ammunition to attack traditional breeding practices. Yet news of disease is not only considered a threat once it is in the hands of the show-world's critics. The stigma surrounding disease means that, within the highly competitive and at times cut-throat world of dog showing, revelations of disease in a rival breeder's kennel are not always met with regret. Unsurprisingly, then, the quarterly publication of BVA/KC Health Scheme test results is something many in the show-world await with baited breath.

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'Oh you'll never guess what,' Susan exclaims with what sounds suspiciously like delight. 'That bloody dog Kerry Smith has been going on and on about – the one she brought over from that breeder in France – it's only predisposed to glaucoma.' It is mid-morning in November and Susan's post has just been delivered. The arrival of the post-woman was signalled by the barking of Susan's Tyrolean Shepherds, which have recently been released from their smaller night-time kennels into the fenced enclosures that take up most of the garden. From the window of the kitchen where Susan and I sit, I can look out at them, huddled in the straw-lined wooden boxes which shelter them from the drizzling rain. Inside the house, the two oldest dogs lie sleeping near the warm stove as Susan quickly discards all but one of her letters, selecting only a large, white envelope sporting the Kennel Club's logo. After quickly making a cup of coffee, she sits down at her kitchen table and tears the paper to pull out an A4-sized paperback publication: the latest edition of the Kennel Club's quarterly *Breed Record Supplement*. 'Here we go,' she enthuses as she flicks through pages and pages of listings to find her breed. For the next ten minutes, Susan pours over the text, occasionally making noises which seem to variously signify approval, frustration, and bemusement. Once she is up-to-date on which breeders have registered litters from which dogs, and which dogs have been sold and to whom, Susan moves onto the final pages of the booklet to find out which dogs have passed or failed health tests in the previous three months. It is in this section that, with little sign of regret, Susan finds evidence that Kerry's new dog has been diagnosed with a predisposition to glaucoma.

'What does that mean?' I ask with regard to the positive test result. 'Probably not much for the dog, knowing how these tests work,' Susan tells me. 'Bad news for Kerry, though. People will have a field day when they hear.' I have only met Kerry once, a few weeks prior, when Susan introduced us at a Championship Show. Nonetheless, I am aware of Kerry's high hopes for her new import. He is from highly sought-after bloodlines, Kerry told me when we met, and after only six months in the UK, the dog is only one 'ticket' away from becoming a Show Champion. I am also aware, thanks to Susan, that many other people in their

breed are not best pleased that Kerry, a relative newcomer, has managed to acquire such a prized dog. As often seems to be the case in the show-world, however, the same breeders who are privately criticising Kerry are among those queuing to use the newly arrived dog at stud. And it is in preparation for breeding that Kerry has submitted the animal for an eye test under the BVA/KC scheme, the results of which have been automatically sent to the Kennel Club for publication.

Predisposition to primary glaucoma is a concern in their breed, but it is a polygenic condition caused by an unknown combination of genes and so far little has been revealed about the mode of inheritance. In other words, although some bloodlines are known to have higher incidences than others, it is generally viewed as an unpredictable condition over which breeders have relatively little control. Susan explains that the current inability to screen for genetic carriers of the condition is made yet more frustrating by the limits of existing phenotypic methods used to screen for the same condition. Glaucoma itself is caused by the build-up of intra-ocular pressure. Liquid is continually produced inside the eyeball and normally flows out via drainage channels. In predisposed dogs, however, these drainage channels are partially occluded, restricting the outflow of liquid and potentially leading to an increase in intra-ocular pressure. This leads to pain and loss of vision, and often necessitates the surgical removal of the eye. Screening programmes involve the inspection of dogs' eyes by BVA-appointed optometrists who use specialist lenses to study the drainage angles in the eye.

The problem with the current screening method, Susan argues, is not only that the test is subjective. More concerning to her is the fact that the pass-or-fail system is based on an arbitrary cut-off point, which is, she assures me, far from the point at which a dog is likely to be affected by the disease. For a Tyrolean Shepherd to pass the test, the examining ophthalmologist must determine that the drainage angles in the eye are no more than 10% occluded. Kerry's dog has failed due to having one eye assessed at 10% and the other at 30% occluded, although, Susan claims, it is only occlusions of 60% or more that cause real

concern among specialists. A BVA ophthalmologist I consult later confirms as much, explaining that:

‘In other breeds, the rate is set much lower because there are many more dogs with significant predisposition. In other breeds – Golden Retrievers, for example – we pass dogs with angles that are 50 or 60% closed because predisposition has become much more pronounced in that breed and few dogs would pass if we set the bar at 90%.’

As is the case with the hip-scoring system, it is the level of disease in the breed as a whole that is used by the BVA/KC schemes to determine where the measure of good health lies.

Hence, the veterinary view of health is as standardised and essentialised as that in the show-world, albeit in different ways. In both practices, what is considered normal in one breed might be classified as pathological in another. Of course, levels of disease vary over time, and – as the ophthalmologist says with regard to Golden Retrievers – what is now ‘abnormal’ might later become normal on account of proliferation. Thus, the responsibility of vets, breeders, and the Kennel Club is to guard against such proliferation, the ophthalmologist reasons. In the case of predisposition to glaucoma, he points out that a significant majority of Tyrolean Shepherds will pass an eye test even if the cut-off level for the test is set at 10% occlusion of the drainage channels. Yet setting the pass-level this high, he argues, will prevent glaucoma rates from creeping upwards in the future.

On the other hand, Susan argues that – while a substantial number of dogs pass the test and are thus declared healthy and fit for breeding – not all dogs who pass are worth breeding from. From a veterinary perspective, cutting mildly-predisposed dogs from the pool of available breeding stock keeps breeds ‘healthy’. From a show-world perspective, however, cutting one of the few remaining ‘good’ dogs is a significant blow for breeders who are trying to maintain show-world standards of canine health and fitness. As Holloway et al. note, health testing of livestock enables ‘a policy of mechanistic discarding or deletion of a proportion of animals,’ (Holloway et al., 2011:543) based on the



assessment of a different kind of merit than that which concerns traditionalist breeders. In the view of many show-breeders, health testing and the veterinary concepts of health to which they refer threaten to remove much of the skill of selective breeding practice.

Like many of her peers, Susan claims that health test results are only one of a number of important criteria which breeders should take into account, particularly when the tests are subjective and don't give a clear answer as to the likelihood that offspring will be affected. Kerry's dog, so Susan tells me, is considered especially 'well-bred' in that he belongs to a particular bloodline which many breeders believe to be true to the original type described in historical records and in the Breed Standard. In many breeders' eyes, this makes him an important and desirable stud, and the reproductive potential of good-quality, 'true-to-type' dogs like him is perceived by show-breeders as crucial to the future wellbeing of the breed. Without a clear answer as to whether or not dogs such as this might pass on disease, breeders are often quick to argue that, 'the baby must not be thrown out with the bathwater.' That is, a dog must not be automatically written-off on the basis of a problematic test result, and – most importantly – the overall standard and quality of a breed must not suffer in pursuit of a specific, veterinary standard of health. This is much more likely to happen, however, once news of disease has been made public knowledge.

### The Virtue of Ignorance

As a final verdict, many in the show-world deem health testing to be as much of a risk as disease itself. Overall, many breeders conclude, it is better to rely on their own knowledge of their dogs and breeds when it comes to making breeding decisions than to seek the opinions of veterinary practitioners. 'Besides,' Susan argues, 'these test results can be very misleading. A lot of the time the vets don't even know what they're looking at.' Encounters with other show-breeders suggest that Susan is not alone in her reasoning. As a prominent breeder of Cavalier's claims:

'I know people who have had their dogs tested and been told not to breed from them because there is a problem, then the dogs go on to live 'til they're 14 without any problems. Really, I think until [veterinary science] can prove that this is the problem they say it is, I think that getting health testing is not in the best interests of this breed. All it does is dredge up things that breeders have been managing to deal with quite well so far, without knowing about all the things [vets] try and tell us these days.'

Ignorance of veterinary knowledge is not, then, a failing on the part of breeders. On the contrary, the show-world is a setting in which Mair et al.'s (2012) recent observations that ignorance 'has a substance of its own,' hold true. As they observe, 'as the product of specific practices [ignorance has] effects that are distinct from the effects of a lack of knowledge to which the ignorance in question corresponds' (Mair et al., 2012:3). Breeders' refusals to engage with veterinary knowledge are not often met with charges of negligence from their show-world peers – unsurprising, perhaps, as veterinary knowledge is seen to hinder, rather than progress, attempts to protect breeds and produce good dogs. Criticism is muted, I argue here, largely due to the general consensus that veterinary knowledge poses a significant threat to show-world concepts of health, including notions of heritability and agency which are seen to determine moral and practical culpability for disease. In the face of this threat, a good number of breeders see each other's deliberate efforts to ignore veterinary knowledge – and each other's refusal to engage in public health testing practices – as an ethically responsible strategy of care. When – as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter – Camilla ignored a vet's advice that she should get her Cavalier's heart tested, she was not necessarily doing so due to any sort of guilt about the matter. If the testimonies of her peers are anything to go by, she was instead upholding her responsibility as a breeder by preventing news of her dog's disease from becoming public knowledge. After all, a problematic health-test result would not only undermine the status of her bitch; it would also throw into question the health of her breed, and thus the virtuosity and moral virtue of Camilla's show-world-endorsed practices of breeding and care.

## Talking or Not Talking about Disease

As Brandt and Rozin observe, the idea that health and morality are synonymous is apparent in many societies (1997:4). The show-world is no exception, although not to the extent that Haraway observes among the breeders she works with in the USA, where, she argues, 'Dog people tend to see any "defects" in their dogs as a "defect" in themselves' (2008:114). In the British show-world, breeders see *public knowledge of disease* as the problem – a shameful moral failure on the part of the breeder or owner of the affected dog. One of the 'worst things' about her dog failing the test for predisposition to glaucoma, Kerry claims, is that her dog's breeder 'is really angry with me. She says I've damaged both our reputations.' It turns out that, like many of her peers, the breeder does not routinely health test her stock. What is more, she is highly critical of others who do so. That the majority of other breeders might value *not* knowing veterinary opinions as to the health of their dogs seems to be a strange thought to the newcomer, who insists that she was, 'Just following the breed club's rules.' She 'didn't even know 'til the test was done that [the Kennel Club] make all the results public.'

The Kennel Club's strategy of making health issues public knowledge is, indeed, problematic for many breeders. The intention seems to be that the publication of test results will allow breeders to make informed, responsible choices about breeding from dogs – or from the relatives of dogs – who have been identified as affected by, predisposed to, or carriers of disease. Yet the fact that most dogs in a breed can be linked through their pedigrees to well-known show winners reinforces the notion of silence as a moral imperative. In the case of male dogs who have been used at stud, discretion is particularly important, for, as Susan notes:

'Some of the top stud dogs have literally thousands of offspring, so you can imagine that there are a lot of people keen to keep problems quiet.'

Yet the conditions mentioned so far in this chapter – mitral valve disease, hip dysplasia, and primary glaucoma – all have two things in common which

somewhat reduce the negative impact that news of disease can have on a dog's close relatives. The first is that all three conditions are currently identified via phenotypical screening programmes which rely on the visual examination of particular body parts. Testing for these conditions, then, involves the identification of manifest incidents of disease which become a problem only once they have been made visible – either due to changes in the dog or in the course of standard veterinary screening programmes.

Yet while phenotypic testing was once considered the cutting-edge of disease-screening protocol, today such tests – although still central to KC/BVA health-testing schemes – are quickly being surpassed by others which identify problematic genes, rather than merely make diagnosis based on the visual observation of body parts. This brings me to the second commonality between mitral valve disease, hip dysplasia, and primary glaucoma: all are understood to have a complex, polygenic mode of inheritance. Not only does this make it extremely difficult to develop genetic tests to screen for these conditions. It also means that there is no clear understanding of how they pass from one generation to the next. Since they cannot easily be mapped onto pedigrees, incidents of these conditions are viewed by breeders through the lens of a particular model of disease transmission – one which Georges Canguilhem terms the 'germ theory' of contagion (1989:40). Accordingly, disease is conceptually located in the isolated bodies of individuals. Thus, the perspective supports a view of disease as something which can be purged from a population by cordoning off affected individuals. So once a breeder has withdrawn a diseased dog from the breeding programme, she can continue to breed from other closely-related animals with relative impunity. With regard to the invisible laws of proliferation, many breeders see their own responsibility for future incidents of disease as limited by the fact that the details of polygenic modes of inheritance are as yet unknown.

After all, breeders ask, what are their options in the face of polygenic disease? Withdrawing all close relatives of affected dogs from breeding programmes on the basis that they *might* pass on disease is not the responsible thing to do, many

argue. And given the continued lack of certainty about modes of disease transmission, most breeders refuse to reconsider the popular show-world concept according to which nature is the much-maligned actor responsible for bringing about incidents of disease. Without specific knowledge of the mode of transmission, breeders argue that their own agency is limited, as indeed is their power to intervene. The only responsible thing to do, most of them argue, is to isolate incidents of disease and otherwise carry on breeding their 'healthy', Breed Standard-fitting dogs. When disease does appear in a kennel, yet the affected dog's parents have not tested positive or shown signs of disease, the breeder may claim exemption from moral responsibility for the disease on the basis that she had no way of knowing that it would affect her litter. And as long as she removes the diseased offspring from her breeding programmes, she can claim with impunity that she is not reporting the occurrence merely because she is doing her best to serve the interests of the breed. In short, with no definitive information about the transmission of polygenic disease, in the view of many breeders, the only responsible thing to do is to remain silent on the matter.

## DNA Tests

The fact is, however, that the vast majority of genetic tests available for dogs do not screen for polygenic conditions. Most screen for conditions which are monogenic – that is, they are caused by the malfunctioning of a single gene. In these cases, testing gives a definitive answer as to the status of the dog as either being entirely clear of disease, a genetic carrier, or directly affected. These results constitute relatively straight-forward and accurate indicators of whether a dog will pass on disease to its offspring, and in these cases, the Kennel Club suggest that DNA tests can be 'used by breeders to effectively eliminate undesirable disease genes in their stock.'<sup>160</sup> Although participation in testing schemes is voluntary, breeders are under significant pressure to comply with suggested testing regimes. Recurrent scandals over pedigree dog health and resultant

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<sup>160</sup> Kennel Club (2015) 'DNA screening schemes and results.'

<http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/health/breeding-for-health/dna-screening-schemes-and-results/> [accessed 11/11/2015].

debates about what counts as good breeding practice leave breeders vulnerable to attacks not only from their show-world peers but also from outsiders who are likely to take the view that those who resist genetic testing are problematic obstacles on the path to breed health. Inevitably, then, the availability of genetic tests has a significant effect on concepts of agency and responsibility in show-world practice.

The relatively simple tests for monogenetic conditions and their definitive results leave few unanswered questions about whether a dog – or a combination of two dogs – is likely to pass on disease to the next generation. Thus, as Holloway et al. note, these tests produce ‘a clear and actionable hierarchy of animals according to the presence or absence of particular marker genes in their genotype’ (2011:543). As with phenotypic testing, however, selection criteria based on genetic knowledge are often largely incompatible with traditional show-world criteria. Breeders are therefore left with few options: they can refuse to test their stock and risk being labelled ‘irresponsible’; they can run the tests and choose to ignore problematic results, risking both disease and public scandal; or they can find a way to engage with the new concepts and complexities of canine health that the tests produce. The final section of this chapter will examine how genetic technologies are, in the words of Carol Morris and Lewis Holloway, ‘layered on to and compete with more established breeding knowledge-practices, notably visual assessment’ (2014:150).

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The claim among some self-defined ‘health-conscious’ breeders is that DNA testing is the way forward when it comes to tackling problems in pedigree dogs, even if many of these breeders are sometimes ambivalent about the prospect of submitting their own dogs for testing. As one Skye Terrier breeder, Rachel, tells me the first time we meet:

‘[Skye Terriers] are a very healthy breed. We have a couple of genetic conditions, but we have DNA tests for them now, so health is not a problem for us.’

Rachel's view of breed health seems typical of many breeders involved in today's show-world. The potential for nature – in the guise of problematic genes – to disrupt the good work of breeders has been nullified by the availability of a test. In Latour's terms, the test and the knowledge it produces effectively turns the genes from intermediaries of nature's agency into intermediaries of breeders' agency – a change which a number of 'health conscious' breeders welcome, even if it does, in many other breeders' opinions, take some of the skill out of selective breeding practice. Consequently, breeders like Rachel who have embraced genetic testing often describe their breeds in terms of the problems which they believe have been – or shortly will be – solved thanks to the availability of screening programmes and the subsequent ability to 'weed-out' rogue or defective genes and limit the agency of nature.

From a critical perspective, it might be argued that tests for 'simple', monogenic conditions allow breeders to engage with veterinary science in a way that – in effect – enables the pedigree breeding project to continue in its 'traditional' form while silencing critics who claim that breeders are not responding to health problems. In Smooth Collies, for instance, a DNA test is now available for what is known as the MDR1 gene, the presence of which causes resistance to a number of drugs which consequently produce adverse side-effects in affected animals. If undiagnosed, the problem is potentially serious, but most breeders agree that – as long as dogs are tested – adjustments can be made to drug treatment regimens and the risk of a bad reaction to a drug can be minimised. The condition, in other words, is not typically seen as a serious threat to breed health. Consequently, few efforts are made to exclude affected dogs from the gene pool, and little – if any – stigma attached to breeding from dogs that test positive for the gene. The availability of the test, however, enables breeders to incorporate the advantages of scientific progress into their breeding programmes and thus, at least in this case, conform with the perspective that that health-conscious breeders health-test their dogs. The point here is that much of the critical discourse about breeders' engagements with genetic technologies is overly simplistic. What is of

note is not merely whether or not breeders engage in testing schemes, but *how*. Just as Morris and Holloway note of the livestock industry, in the show-world:

‘There are subtle layers of engagement with different breeding technologies ... based on the breeders’ own breeding strategies and on their ... experience’ (2014:157).

In Smooth Collies, as in certain other breeds, the availability of DNA testing schemes for relatively minor conditions provides evidence that breeders are taking veterinary health concerns seriously while still focusing on show-world, rather than veterinary standards of health. Demands to improve the health of their breeds no doubt leave many other breeders and breed clubs under pressure to introduce, as one breeder puts it, ‘some sort of DNA test’. In short, the new-found potential to limit the agency of nature as it plays out in problematic genes comes with new responsibilities of care. Consequently, show-world critics observe, breed clubs are often quick to support and fund studies into specific conditions where the production of a DNA test seems likely, particularly if the availability of a test promises to counter current criticism.

The Pekingese is a case in point. The small, short-faced, heavily-coated dogs have long been the subject of substantial criticism regarding their perceived ill-health. Most famously, it has long been rumoured that the 2003 winner of Crufts Best in Show award – a Pekingese named Ch Yakee A Dangerous Liaison, or Danny for short – underwent corrective surgery to relieve his airway from a dangerous obstruction. The problem is described by the University of Glasgow Veterinary School, where the dog underwent the procedure, as the result of the extreme shortening of the Pekingese’s face, which often leads to the bunching of soft tissue at the back of the throat and can hinder the dog’s ability to breathe.<sup>161</sup> <sup>162</sup> Soft palate reconstructions like the one allegedly performed on Danny remove this

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<sup>161</sup> See *Pedigree Dogs Exposed* (2008) Passionate Productions;

<sup>162</sup> Harrison, J. (2016) ‘Crufts 2016: Watery-eyed, exercise-intolerant maggot wins the toy group.’ *Pedigree Dog Exposed: The blog*.

<http://pedigreedogsexposed.blogspot.co.uk/2016/03/crufts-2016-watery-eyed-exercise.html> [last accessed 13/06/2016].



excess tissue, and are commonly associated with short-faced, 'brachycephalic' breeds (see Meola, 2013; Koch et al., 2003).



Figure 28: Ch Yakee A Dangerous Liaison, or 'Danny', Winner of Best in Show at Crufts 2003.<sup>163</sup>

Given that Danny was a Crufts winner, news of the surgery caused outrage, as critics asked how a dog who had undergone major surgery to correct a conformational defect could win the most prestigious prize at the world's top dog show.<sup>164</sup> The revelations prompted many questions as to whether any Pekingese are fit to be bred from or exhibited in their current form (see Kavin, 2016). As critics note, this has not been the only controversy to affect the Pekingese, a breed that was mentioned as a source of concern in a 1995 update to the *European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals*.<sup>165</sup> The breed also features on the Kennel Club's list of High Profile Breeds, all of which are deemed by the Club's veterinary advisors to have 'an above average risk of health problems related to exaggeration of breed type.'<sup>166</sup> When it comes to the root cause of the Pekingese's

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<sup>163</sup> Photo from 'Pedigree Dogs Exposed: The Blog,'

<http://pedigreedogsexposed.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/pekes-is-this-really-true.html> [retrieved 19/07/2016].

<sup>164</sup> Harrison, J. (2016) Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> *Multilateral Consultation of Parties to the European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals* (1995) 'Resolution on the Breeding of Pet Animals.'

[http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/PDF/125\\_Resolution\\_10-03-1995\\_ENG.pdf](http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/PDF/125_Resolution_10-03-1995_ENG.pdf) [accessed 26/05.2014]

<sup>166</sup> Kennel Club (2011) 'Dog Health Group Annual Report 2010.'

<http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/173993/doghealthgroupannualreport2010.pdf> [accessed 14/03/2014]

breathing difficulties, veterinary experts suggest the problem is due to phenotypic rather than genotypic abnormalities: although the problem is inheritable, it is not widely believed in the veterinary community to be caused by the actions of 'nature' in the form of an abnormal gene. Rather, the veterinary understanding is that the problem is caused by breeders who wish to breed dogs with extremely short faces – that is, breeders' own practices are blamed for the problem.

When it comes to resolving the Pekingese's problems, veterinary and show-world perspectives remain at fundamental odds. Dan Brockman, Professor of Small Animal Medicine and Head of Clinical Sciences and Services at the Royal Veterinary College in London, states in a report published by the Advisory Council on Welfare Issues in Dog Breeding, that if altering Breed Standards to fit 'healthy conformational limits' is not enough, continued breeding 'may require judicious outcrossing programmes to restore brachycephalic breeds to a phenotype that is truly fit for life' (Brockman in Crispin, 2012:12). Members of the Pekingese Breed Club don't agree. On the advice of a Canadian veterinarian, Dr Terill Udenberg – a man who, according to his personal Facebook page, is also an experienced pedigree dog breeder and exhibitor, and an international dog show judge<sup>167</sup> – the Pekingese Club encourages members to participate in a study being conducted by a laboratory in the United States. The aim is to identify a gene behind brachycephalic airway syndrome – the problem from which Crufts winner Danny was suffering. As *Our Dogs* newspaper reports, Dr Udenberg points out that:

'relatively small shifts in nasal shape was [sic] a major contributor to the ability of Pekingese dogs and other Brachycephalic breeds to breathe more easily.'<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Tees Poodles. [https://www.facebook.com/teespoodles/info/?tab=page\\_info](https://www.facebook.com/teespoodles/info/?tab=page_info) [accessed 17/11/2015]

<sup>168</sup> *Our Dogs* (2010) 'Pekingese and Bulldogs make history together.' <https://www.ourdogs.co.uk/News/2010/Jan2010/News220110/peke.htm> [accessed 17/11/2015]

Not all Pekingese suffer from brachycephalic airway syndrome, supporters of the study reason and suggest that the discovery of 'rogue' genes will soon prove that the disease is not the fault of breeders. After all, rogue genes are the product of nature, whose perceived intervention in breeding practice is seen to exempt breeders from responsibility. As one Pekingese breeder and supporter of the testing scheme tells me, the discovery of a 'new' gene 'would show that it's not our fault; that we haven't been doing anything wrong.' After all, until veterinary scientists reach the point at which they can standardise a reliable test, the effects of nature are widely held to be unpredictable as they travel hidden through generations and between bloodlines. As far as most breeders are concerned, proof that nature – by way of intermediary rogue genes – is responsible for brachycephalic airway syndrome will exonerate them. After all, show-breeders argue, without knowledge of the genetic nature of the condition, or a test to select unaffected breeding stock, even the most conscientious among them are helpless to prevent disease. Yet this is not the only hope that breeders hold for the test. Crucially, as they see it, a DNA test which identifies dogs prone to developing the syndrome will allow for selective breeding to eliminate breathing problems without changing the appearance of their breed; that is, without radically changing their own show-world notions of what counts as a healthy dog.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined how responsibility for incidents of disease is defined, distributed, and deferred in the show-world, and how breeders' views on the matter differ from the views of vets and other show-world critics. In doing so, I have also considered how certain breeders incorporate particular forms of veterinary knowledge into their practice, while for others who actively rejected such knowledge, the rejection of testing and the cultivation of ignorance becomes an ethical project in itself. Developing the argument put forward by Holloway et al. that health testing 'offers tools and proofs that create a new method for determining what counts as good and poor animals' (Holloway et al., 2011:543), I have suggested that health testing in the show-world threatens to reconfigure

not only the measure of a good dog, but also that of a good breeder. I hope to have shown how, in both cases, veterinary testing first undermines traditional notions of what is good by challenging the long-standing show-world emphasis on skilled, visual appraisal as a key measure of practical virtuosity. Secondly, I have argued that health testing undermines show-world notions of goodness by challenging the concept of health as the inevitable product of traceable human agency in the histories of pedigree dogs and their breeds. Yet since the Kennel Club and an increasing number of breeders have been promoting health-testing as a moral imperative, those unwilling to health-test are left struggling to assert the virtue of competing forms of practice.

Given the overwhelming amount of negative attention that pedigree dog breeding has received in the wake of recent health scandals, it is hardly surprising that breeders are keen to seek out any solutions which might make breeding from dogs with high rates of disease less ethically problematic. Yet even though some breeders demonstrate a great enthusiasm for DNA testing and the selective breeding of tested stock, it seems that show-world perspectives on the future of health testing are fundamentally at odds with discourses emerging from veterinary-science. For while breeders look to eliminate genetic disease through the further reduction of gene-pools, veterinary-science is increasingly concerned with the high levels of inbreeding and low effective population sizes which typify a number of breeds and are recognised as key factors in the proliferation of genetic disease. In short, while veterinary science advocates the expansion of gene pools, breeders are predominantly sceptical of scientific knowledge and instead tend to heed the traditional breeding imperative to minimise diversity. In many cases, it is genetic testing rather than genetic diversity that has caught the imagination of health-conscious show-breeders, as, I argue, certain forms of testing provide a means of refuting public claims of anti-scientific bias while remaining loyal to Breed Standards and show-world ideas of perfection.

With regard to responsibility for genetic diseases, I have followed James Laidlaw's lead and used Bruno Latour's concept of agency to argue that members

of the show-world do not see the appearance of disease in the bodies of dogs as results of their own actions. In the show-world, the general consensus is that genetic disease appears due to the action of nature. While skilled, responsible breeders claim to practice their craft to the best of their knowledge and in ways that they hope will produce healthy, Standard-fitting dogs, so too they accept that it is simply inevitable that their attempts to tame and subdue the forces of nature will, on occasion, fail. It is at this point, many in the show-world argue, that a breeder's responsibility ends. Yet as I have argued, veterinary testing has been revealing new knowledge about genetics; knowledge which reassigns agency – and with it, responsibility – to breeders.

In line with Laidlaw's argument, I have further argued that the tendency among breeders to attribute responsibility for disease to nature highlights the fact that:

‘What is and is not causally significant is not .... a straightforwardly factual matter but a matter of interpretation ... whether any causal account in fact illuminates and explains always depends on whom the explanation is for’ (Laidlaw, 2010:146).

My point here is this: breeders' concept of nature as an actor may exempt them from responsibility when it comes to genetic disease. However, show-world critics often see things differently. After all, as Laidlaw argues, responsibility is not simply assigned 'because of a chain of cause and effect', but rather because actors and things are seen to stand in a particular 'agentive relationship'. And while the show-world view may be that nature continues to exert strong influence on the health of pedigree dogs, critics outside the show-world tend to disagree. Here, I argue, the general view is that the bodies of pedigree dogs are inherently unnatural in both the moral and material sense. In other words, breeders' efforts to cultivate the bodies of pedigree dogs have nullified nature's influence, and incidents of disease are seen as breeders' own responsibility.

Unsurprisingly, show-breeders often seem to be at pains to keep discussions of disease – particularly manifest incidents of disease – to a minimum. Yet this

would seem to be nothing new in the show-world, where many claim it has long been the case that disease only becomes a serious issue when it becomes public knowledge. These days, though, as an ever-growing number of revelations from veterinary science implicate traditional show-world practices in the development of conformational defects and inheritable disease, certain forms of knowledge become a liability to breeders dedicated to the task of maintaining breeds in their current forms. Here, I argue that for show-breeders like Camilla the dismissal of veterinary knowledge provides a means of protecting established show-world practices and traditions, as does their willingness to remain silent in the face of manifest incidents of disease. In this context, ignorance, rather than knowledge, is an ethical virtue. What is important to note, however, is that this is a specific form of ignorance; not one which results from a lack of engagement with new information based on involuntary naivety, but rather one in which knowledge is deliberately kept at a safe distance. Camila and her peers are not, after all, incapable of understanding veterinary ways of knowing and thinking about disease. Theirs is not an inability but a refusal to engage, which itself requires the skilled, measured cultivation of alternate engagements with the issue of disease, engagements which marginalise or indeed counteract certain forms of veterinary knowledge and practice. For such breeders, ignorance and silence are not only a means of protecting established practice. Ignorance of veterinary knowledge and silence about disease are also forms of care.



## Chapter Seven – Negotiating Care

On a chilly Sunday morning in late summer 2012, I am shown into the staff canteen of a large agricultural hall in northern England. The air is warm and humid, the slightly stale smell replacing the pungent odours of dog urine and hair-styling product that fill the main hall where judging is about to start. Lit with fluorescent strip-lighting and furnished with melamine tables and plastic chairs, the canteen is functioning as an office for members of the show's committee. The 12 women, all of whom appear to be over the age of 60, are dressed in matching blue blazers, their lapels adorned with shining silver pin-badges signalling their membership of the Kennel Club and various show societies. Also in the room, a number of well-known Championship Show judges, seemingly grateful for the warmth the canteen offers, if not, perhaps, for the watery instant coffee, cups of which sit unfinished on most of the tables. I make my way over to a table where Barbara, a well-known breeder of both English and French Bulldogs, sits talking with a younger woman. Barbara's companion, it turns out, is the duty vet; a junior member of staff from a local practice whose managers have nominated her to spend the weekend providing veterinary support at the show.

As I'd hoped, Barbara – a committee member in her late seventies – is happy to talk. Indeed, it appears that a conversation about the practicalities of breeding is already underway. 'I've been breeding dogs for over 50 years,' Barbara announces as I sit down, seemingly unconcerned as to who I am<sup>169</sup> or how – as an unknown face in the show world – I have managed to gain entry to the exclusive committee room. Pointing at the vet, the breeder explains to me that 'I'm telling her what she needs to learn about Bulldogs.' The vet gives a small shrug and smiles patiently as Barbara goes on to explain the problems, as she sees them, with the approach most vets take when caring for the Bull breeds. 'You people

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<sup>169</sup> Later in the conversation, I inform Barbara who I am and what I'm doing at the show, and she gives me her consent to include her in my study.



make a pretty penny from us,' she accuses the vet when the subject of Caesarean sections comes up, claiming that:

'First, we pay you to inseminate the bitches, then we pay you to deliver the puppies. It's a miracle any of us can afford to breed a litter after all that.'

Shifting her attention to me, Barbara explains that, due to the Bulldog's physique, it is now standard practice for Bulldog bitches to be artificially inseminated, rather than risk the injury and fatigue that both sexes might incur in the course of a 'natural' mating. As she tells it:

'A lot of us know how to [collect semen and inseminate a bitch] ourselves, but there are quite a few that go to the vet to have it done, and it's not cheap – over £500 each go – and there's no guarantee it will work.'

Even more expensive, Barbara complains, are Caesarean sections, which are now a routine part of the reproductive process for Bulldogs. This is widely thought to be due to the fact that, for many years, the Bulldog Breed Standard specified that the dogs should have a 'strikingly massive' head, 'large in proportion to the size of the dog's body' (Kennel Club, 1998). Bulldog breeders have long followed the directive of 'the larger the better' (Kennel Club, *ibid*), and the subsequent mismatch between the large heads of Bulldog puppies and the pelvic anatomy of Bulldog bitches now means that delivery usually has to occur via Caesarean section (see Eneroth et.al., 1999). 'And now the Kennel Club are telling us we're not allowed to breed from a bitch that's already had two [Caesarean] sections,' Barbara reports with frustration. 'That's thanks to your people,' she says, pointing her finger at the vet. 'Our breeds look very bad because of what you say about us.'

Luckily, Barbara tells us, she has found a sympathetic vet who is happy to defer to her expertise on the matter, scheduling C-sections ahead of the bitches' due

dates and withholding notification of the procedures from the Kennel Club. As she claims:

‘He’s a good man. He knows that we know what we’re doing with these dogs ... I’ve sat in [on the procedure] – he’s very good: it’s all over before you know it and the bitch recovers very quickly. It’s much better for the bitches that way.’

Thanks to his flexibility, Barbara reports, the vet is exceptionally respected and popular among breeders of the Bull breeds, many of whom travel and hour or more from their homes to his surgery to seek out what they considered to be the best care for their dogs. But many other breeders and dogs who live further afield are not so lucky, Barbara worries:

‘People won’t want their bitches to go for [Caesarean] sections if there is a chance the vet will report it to the Kennel Club, and so we’re going to see a lot of people losing bitches and puppies when they try to make them give birth naturally. It’s like my vet says: it’s just not normal for these breeds to give birth naturally.’



*Figure 29: A Bulldog.<sup>170</sup>*

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<sup>170</sup> Photo by Marcia O'Connor, reproduced under licence Creative Commons. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/97477873@N00/> {retrieved 16/06/2016}.

Although seemingly more extreme than most – and thus much talked about by critics – the quandaries facing both Bulldog breeders and their vets are typical of the sort of problems encountered on a daily basis by anyone caring for pedigree dogs. Time and again I am told that breeders and vets alike are in a tight spot. Breeders are committed to the project of preserving and promoting their breeds, a task which is becoming notably more difficult as new practical and moral demands are imposed on them from all directions. High levels of disease are becoming more and more apparent, and a shifting public and institutional discourse increasingly emphasises the health and wellbeing of pedigree dogs as individuals, rather than as members of their breeds. The growing public and institutional allegiance with a veterinary ideal of health is forcing breeders to make difficult choices and find ways to reassert show-world meanings of health against strongly moralised notions of disease reduction and genetic diversity – two ideologies which, when taken together as has been done of late, make the project of breeding pedigree dogs near impossible. At the same time, vets often struggle to meet the demands of caring for pedigree dogs in practice. The tripartite relationship between vet, dog, and owner complicates decisions about treatment, as does the fact that veterinary medicine is, ultimately, a commercial venture. Vets are painfully aware of the need to appease their clients, a challenge which, many vets report, often necessitates uncomfortable ethical compromises. In short, providing the ‘best’ care for dogs, breeds, owners, livelihoods, and selves is not always possible all at once, or indeed at all.

In this final chapter, I discuss the realities of caring for pedigree dogs and their breeds, examining the continual negotiations between breeders and vets involved in sustaining what are often inherently unstable forms of life. In the show-rings, kennels, and veterinary clinics where pedigree dog breeders and vets meet, their respective concepts of what is healthy and good in the bodies of pedigree dogs often seem irreconcilable. As I have argued in previous chapters, the problem is not merely that breeders and vets have different priorities when

it comes to canine health, but rather that they work within different conceptual systems altogether, all the while using a shared language of 'health' and 'fitness' to refer to very different things. While both concepts of health are practice-specific, one is based on a bio-medicalised notion of the individual canine body as free from disease, the other on an idealised aesthetic seen to relate to the original function of the dog's breed. Nonetheless, breeders often rely on veterinary assistance in caring for their dogs, and vets hold a professional responsibility of care for dogs as patients. So too, vets have a professional stake in the treatment of pedigree dogs, which often provides a significant source of income. In short, their mutual dependencies mean that vets and breeders face the continual challenge of finding ways to work together. It is these attempts at collaborative care which serve as the focus of this chapter.

As I have so far argued in this thesis, when breeders and vets bring their different concepts of health, responsibility, and care to each other's practices, tensions inevitably arise. In this chapter, I argue that it is not always possible to reconcile these tensions, since the differences between show-world and veterinary understandings of health and goodness are conceptual. Good care often relies on the ability to transcend these differences in the course of practice. I argue that, in many cases, the ability to find workable solutions relies on the willingness of both vets and breeders to remain silent about certain moral implications, and instead focus on the details of practice. Following on from the previous chapter, my argument here is that silence is an important aspect of care encounters in which show-world and veterinary practices meet. In short, I argue that just as important as knowing what to say is knowing what *not* to say. Silence enables different concepts of health and care to co-exist in shared practice. As John Law suggests, veterinary care:

'Can be understood as an improvised and experimental choreography for holding together and holding apart relatively non-coherent versions of care, their objects, and their subjectivities. It is the art of holding all those versions of care in the air without letting them collapse into collision' (Law, 2010:69).

Of interest here is how breeders and vets manage to work together day-to-day despite their divergent concepts of health, divergent understandings of what a pedigree dog is – individual or breed member – and the divergent criteria by which they assess the virtue of their practice in relation to their situated ideals. This chapter, then, responds to anthropological conversations on care in practice led by Annemarie Mol and her colleagues who argue that:

‘In care practice ... it is taken as inevitable that different ‘goods’, reflecting not only different values but also different ways of ordering reality, have to be dealt with together. Raising an argument about which good is best ‘in general’ makes little sense. Instead, care implies a negotiation about how different goods might coexist in a given, specific local practice’ (Mol et al., 2010:13. See also Mol, 2008).

My focus is on how practical and ethical compromises involved in these negotiations become part of good, responsible care. As Mol et al. further note, ‘negotiation’ – a term which suggests verbal interaction – must be used with an awareness that, in care encounters, ‘seeking a compromise between different ‘goods’ does not necessarily depend on talk, but can also be a matter of practical tinkering, of attentive experimentation’ (2010:13). While I use the term here, I do so in the context of ethnographic examples that stress negotiation as a non-verbal process in which knowing when to speak and when to keep silent is key to moving around and through conceptual obstacles that stand in the way of care. As John Law suggests, negotiating care requires the careful choreographing of different forms of practice which ‘depends not so much on a situated formula as a repertoire’ (Law, 2010:67, drawing on Cussins, 1996). So, although both vets<sup>171</sup> and breeders<sup>172</sup> are theoretically bound by institutional codes of ethics and often speak of their own obligations as absolute and non-negotiable, I argue that, when faced with the complex realities of daily practice, both act in ways which reveal

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<sup>171</sup> See Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (2015) ‘Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons.’ <http://www.rcvs.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/code-of-professional-conduct-for-veterinary-surgeons/> [accessed 10/10/2015]

<sup>172</sup> See Kennel Club (2015) ‘Kennel Club Code of Ethics.’ <http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/breeding/breeding-from-your-dog/kennel-club-code-of-ethics/> [accessed 10/10/2015]

these moral duties to be flexible and responsive. In particular, I argue that collaborations between veterinary and show-world practice are based on an ethical consensus that there are limits to caring for the multiple – for dogs, breeds, colleagues, clients, histories, livelihoods, and selves. Rather than aiming for perfection, both often simply aim to make things a little better within the structural limits of their practice (see Mol et al., 2010).

Drawing on an emergent anthropological literature on practices of care, this chapter will argue that breeding pedigree dogs is not a project in which breeders are expected to produce the perfect specimen, nor to rectify all the problems affecting their breeds. Rather, the goal of many pedigree dog breeders is simply to preserve their breeds and, where possible, to prevent decline in the quality of future generations of pedigree dogs. Likewise – and just as Annemarie Mol and colleagues (2010) have argued with regard to human-medicine – in veterinary medicine, the fact that certain patients will never be ‘cured’ is often implicitly accepted. Rather than aiming to heal, veterinary practitioners often aim to prevent a decline in the individual dog’s health while making slight improvements to the patient’s quality of life: to increase comfort, prolong life, and provide good care. Again picking up on notions of nature as an active agent responsible for disease, I return to James Laidlaw’s (2010) work on the relationship between agency and responsibility, examining how veterinary approaches variously play in to or problematize show-world notions of who or what holds responsibility for disease. In doing so, I show how care in the veterinary clinic involves complex ethical negotiations, in the course of which many things remain unsaid by both vet and client. Here, I argue that it is in such silence that breeders and vets often find a workable compromise, and that when the goal is maintenance rather than transformation – improvement rather than perfection, and aiming for something that is slightly better rather than insisting on the best – show-world and veterinary practices of care can become mutually acceptable in both practical and ethical terms.

## Surgical Interventions and the Ethics of Care

Two months after meeting Barbara and hearing about her vet's willingness to perform surgeries off the record, I find myself in the company of a different vet somewhat troubled by her latest encounter with a Bulldog breeder. A specialist in canine reproduction, Melanie is a vet who breeders turn to when 'natural' matings prove difficult. As Barbara claimed, 'natural' matings, much like 'natural' delivery, are a rare occurrence in Bulldogs, so for breeders unwilling or unable to perform 'DIY' inseminations, visits to reproduction clinics like the one where Melanie works are a routine part of the reproductive process. In stark contrast to their attitude towards Caesarean deliveries, however, the Kennel Club does not generally allow the use of assisted reproductive technologies. As a senior Kennel Club staff member explains:

'We think [artificial insemination] is unnatural ... We believe all dogs should be able to mate naturally. If they can't, we have to say, well, maybe they shouldn't be bred from.'

After several run-ins with the Kennel Club, Melanie is all too aware of the organisation's policy, but remains firm in her conviction that reproductive assistance improves the welfare of many dogs. 'Natural' mating, she argues, is not always the ethically sound practice that it is made out to be. According to Melanie, reluctant bitches are all too often forced to submit to the advances of stud dogs which they would otherwise reject. Much like Melanie, I have seen bitches being muzzled and held down by breeders while a stud dog is hoisted on top. 'It's completely unethical,' Melanie claims, 'and it's madness that the Kennel Club insist people force [dogs and bitches] to mate 'naturally'. What's natural about pinning a bitch down while she screams her head off?'

The mating of Bulldogs, in particular, has become a source of concern, Melanie observes, especially as the use of so-called 'mating-cradles' is being promoted by some well-known breeders. The Y-shaped metal frames are designed to hold Bulldog bitches in place, their front legs elevated off the ground, allowing the

heavy male to mount without the bitch either resisting or collapsing under his weight. 'How is that in any way natural?' Melanie asks when the subject comes up in conversation. Much more humane, she argues, is the skilled, clinical use of biomedically recognised assistive technologies in a caring environment where both dog and owner are at ease. True to her claim, during the vast majority of the hundred or so procedures I witness at her clinic, the dogs Melanie deals with seem relaxed and unperturbed. On the odd occasion when a dog or bitch does appear to be nervous or stressed, Melanie spends significant lengths of time gently calming the animal down, and when these attempts fail, she calls off the process, resolute that the dog's welfare trumps both the clinic's profits and the breeder's wish to produce a litter. In the care Melanie provides, pedigree dogs are not only breed members of reproductive significance, but individuals with a right to refuse certain treatments and procedures. As she makes very clear from the outset of any clinical encounter, she requires the implied consent of the dog as well as the express consent of the owner, before she will carry out any procedure. So while economy and morality are not mutually exclusive in her clinic, there is a specific order of priority in the care she provides.

Yet while Melanie makes a strong case for the use of veterinary technologies to improve individual welfare, the flip-side to the argument makes her, and the other vets I work with, uncomfortable. Like it or not, it seems that there is some merit in the argument that veterinary treatments enable the propagation of what veterinary medicine itself sees as unhealthy and 'unnatural' forms of life. Breeders often point this out to counter criticism from vets, but in the ongoing contest between their respective practices, it seems that breeders' arguments are rarely given serious consideration by members of the veterinary profession. 'What would they rather we do?' asks Melanie with some exasperation when I put to her the suggestion that her own work is, perhaps, supporting the very practices and ideologies the veterinary profession criticises in breeders. 'If I didn't do it, [breeders would] still find ways to breed their dogs, but the dogs would suffer.'



Melanie may have a point, but from a critical perspective it is arguably harder to make the same case for vets performing Caesarean sections on Bulldogs. Although the issue is rarely raised in the show-world, it seems unlikely that breeders themselves would be able to sustain a breed which requires surgical intervention on such a large scale. As Bulldog breeder Barbara is quick to confirm, 'Almost everyone in Bulldogs takes their bitches for a [Caesarean] section.' The little data available supports her claim; In 2004, the Kennel Club carried out a survey of over 22,000 litters across 170 registered pedigree dog breeds, and found that 92.3% of Boston Terriers, 86.1% of Bulldogs, and 81.3% of French Bulldogs were being delivered via Caesarean section (see Evans & Adams, 2010:115). My own conversations with breeders suggest that, if anything, Caesarean rates were under-reported in the survey, with breeders like Barbara refusing to tell the Kennel Club about operations on prize bitches so as to retain the right to breed future litters. As Barbara explains, hers is not an unethical way of breeding. Like artificial insemination Caesarean delivery is, she tells me, 'the way everyone does it', presenting both practices as pragmatic responses to problems beyond breeders' control. Barbara argues that it makes sense for all concerned – breeders, vets, and dogs – that elective Caesareans are carried out before parturition begins. She tells me:

'Like my vet says, it suits them because they know what's coming. They're not called out of their beds in the middle of the night to open up a bitch with a dead puppy stuck in the birth canal. And it suits breeders because it takes away the worry. Plus a planned section on a Tuesday afternoon is cheaper than an emergency [Caesarean] at two o'clock on a Sunday morning ... [and] it's definitely better for the dogs. Whelping is a difficult thing for a bitch. It's not fair to put her through it if there is a better way.'

Barbara, much like many other Bulldog breeders, is firmly committed to the challenge of preserving the breed in its Standard-fitting form. In response to this challenge, the scheduled delivery of puppies via C-section has become an established and accepted means of providing good care in her breed. Although Breed Standards have recently been revised in the hope of reducing physical

exaggerations such as the disproportionately large head size of the Bulldog, few breeders are optimistic that anatomical changes will be quick to follow. For now, Barbara has accepted that reproductive interventions are all part and parcel of breeding Bulldogs, and – veterinary fees notwithstanding – she argues that these procedures are a small price to pay so long as she and her fellow breeders can continue to produce Breed Standard-fitting dogs.

However, not everyone in the show-world agrees that either breeders or vets are right to accept the need for reproductive intervention. In his 2010 *Independent Inquiry into Dog Breeding* commissioned by the British Government, Professor of Ethnology at the University of Cambridge, Sir Patrick Bateson observes that:

‘it is only the ready availability of modern veterinary medicine that has permitted some conditions – such as the inability to give birth without surgical intervention – to become widespread’ (Bateson, 2010).

A year earlier, in 2009, veterinary professor and future Chairman of the Kennel Club Steve Dean told colleagues at the British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA) annual congress that it is wrong of the veterinary profession to passively accept problems such as the prevalence of Caesarean sections in the Bulldog. How can it be known, Professor Dean asked, whether bitches in this breed are capable of whelping naturally when C-sections are being performed as a matter of routine? And the problem is not limited to birthing issues, Professor Dean argued:

‘There are too many [vets] willing to repair an entropion, repair an umbilical hernia, repair dogs that have conformational defects and then just keep it quiet. And some are even willing to write the most amazing letters to the Kennel Club saying that this change has not been done because of a conformational, congenital defect, or an inherited defect, but because of medical reasons’ (in *Veterinary Record*, 2009).

Veterinarians' and breeders' silencing of the procedures is 'not helpful,' Professor Dean concluded. Both publically and in private interviews, Dean and other Kennel Club representatives insist that veterinary compliance with breeders' wishes means that at least part of the responsibility for the prevalence of conformational defects in pedigree dogs lies with members of the profession. Indeed, as long ago as 1998, the Kennel Club reportedly accused the veterinary profession of exacerbating the problem of inheritable defects by performing corrective procedures with such skill that it becomes impossible for show judges to tell that the animals have been operated on (see Foster 1998:267). Today, the message remains clear: even if vets are not actively encouraging the breeding of diseased animals, they are – at the very least – complicit in the practice.<sup>173</sup>

'But what are the options?' asks another vet, Jamie, when I raise the possibility during a lunchtime conversation in his surgery. He continues:

'We're not giving them C-sections out of choice, you know. We do it because we – and our clients – have seen what happens when a natural birth goes wrong. And it does, most of the time, with these dogs. So we can leave it to chance and hope for the best, but plenty of times this will end up with us being called to the surgery in the middle of the night to perform an emergency section, by which time most of the pups might well be dead and the bitch is in real trouble. Then we have to whack the client with a huge bill for an out-of-hours op. You try asking a client who's just lost a litter worth eight grand for fifteen-hundred quid to cover the cost. You're more likely to end up getting sued than getting paid.'

The worry about legal action is a common theme in conversations with practising vets, particularly when it comes to the routine scheduling of Caesarean sections. Despite professing his own ethical misgivings, general-practice vet Jamie – an outspoken critic of health problems in pedigree dogs – claims that:

'It's just too much of a risk to let [Bulldogs] deliver naturally... For everyone – the bitch, the puppies, and the vet. Dog breeders are

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<sup>173</sup> Interview with Kennel Club Health and Breeder Services Manager, Bill Lambert, October 2011. Kennel Club, London.

difficult clients. They're pretty quick to threaten legal action or a complaint to the RCVS [Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons]. That's not something anyone wants to deal with.'

So for Jamie, too, elective Caesareans are an important means of protecting and caring for the wellbeing of his patients and his practice. Yet they are also an important means of protecting himself from the consequences of birthing complications which, he argues, have unfairly become the responsibility of vets rather than breeders:

'It's not like we want people to breed these dogs. Don't get me wrong, a Bulldog on the books will certainly bring in the cash, but vets care about animal welfare and we'd rather not have to deal with these problems. But the breeders keep breeding and keep expecting us to fix all the problems they've created. Like I say, we don't have much choice.'

Representatives of the Kennel Club disagree, arguing that vets do have some choice in the matter.<sup>174</sup> For one thing, they argue that vets can report Caesarean sections to the Kennel Club, who keep records and limit the amount of C-section litters that can be registered to any particular bitch.<sup>175</sup> As of January 2012, the limit has been reduced to two Caesareans per bitch, after which the Kennel Club will refuse to register any further litters.<sup>176</sup> For breeders, this means that a second Caesarean marks the end of a bitch's breeding career, or at least it does if the surgeries have been reported to the Kennel Club by either breeder or vet. Yet despite the fact that, in registering their dog with the Kennel Club, pedigree dog owners agree to allow their vets to report surgical procedures, none of the vets I questioned felt they were likely to do so. Few vets express any sense of duty

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<sup>174</sup> For example, see Kennel Club Chairman Professor Steve Dean quoted in *Veterinary Record* (2009).

<sup>175</sup> Kennel Club (2012) 'Breeding Restrictions' <http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/services/public/breed/restrictions.aspx?id=4084> [accessed 18/11/2014].

<sup>176</sup> Like most of the rules that applied to Kennel Club registration, this one was also negotiable, breeders claimed. Several noted that, as was the case with litters born of unions between first-degree relatives, the Kennel Club would grant exception if breeders stated that the third litter had been the result of an accidental mating.

towards the Kennel Club, an organisation which most view as morally suspect due to its willingness to endorse the breeding of dogs affected by conformational problems and inheritable disease. What is more, none of the vets I questioned thought that reporting surgeries would make a substantial difference to pedigree dog welfare. On the contrary, they expressed concern about the added strain this would place on their relationships with their clients, and pointed out their professional obligations to uphold client rights to confidentiality. Figures released by the Kennel Club suggest that most vets feel the same way. As the *Veterinary Record* reports, 'In the first six months of 2012 only 2.7% of all Caesarean sections reported to the KC were reported by vets' (*Veterinary Record*, 2013:430). The other 97.3% were reported by breeders themselves, which, as Bulldog breeder Barbara points out, leaves the accuracy of the Kennel Club's figures open to some doubt.

What is more, it is not only Caesarean sections that members of the veterinary profession are asked to report to the Kennel Club, but also any other intervention which alters the natural conformation of a pedigree dog.<sup>177</sup> This requirement long predates the 2012 ruling on Caesarean sections, and breeders seem to have a clear sense of the implications. 'Hardly anyone [reports surgeries] in our breed,' Pug Breeder Mabel tells me when I quiz her on the issue as we sit together ringside at a dog show. 'But I know there are quite a few [breeders] that have had things done,' she claims. 'It's the same in Shar Pei,' a friend of Mabel's confirms of her own breed. She continues:

'A lot of the dogs need their eyes tacked when they're young puppies. The heavy wrinkles mean we have a lot of entropion, but the vets are very good at surgery these days. Most of the time, you can't even tell [the dogs] have had it done, so people don't report it [to the Kennel Club] or else they wouldn't be able to show [the dogs].'

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<sup>177</sup> See Kennel Club (2014) 'Caesarean Operations and Procedures which Alter the Natural Confirmation of a Dog,' <http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/vets-researchers/caesarean-operations-and-procedures-which-alter-the-natural-conformation-of-a-dog/> [accessed 18/11/2014].

Despite the controversy and criticism that surround the practice, the woman maintains that corrective eyelid surgery is now widespread in her breed to the point where it has become an inevitable part of life. Furthermore, she and Mabel agree, it is not something that should necessarily put an end to a career of a show dog. 'If you took all the Shar Pei who've had their eyes tacked out of the ring, there wouldn't be many left,' the Shar Pei breeder argues. And while the Kennel Club may insist breeders abide by set rules, the ability to respond to the pressing needs of the breed relies on flexibility in breeders' practice, and – in this case – on the silence of the vets involved in the dogs' care.

Besides, the same breeder observes, the Shar Pei has other health problems to contend with which are much more difficult to treat and thus much more likely to affect the dogs' quality of life in the long-term. As she concludes: 'I think we're quite lucky with things like entropion, really: It's so easy to sort out these days.' And while submitting young puppies to eye-tacking procedures is, as she puts it, 'not something we want to do,' it is 'something we have to do, at this point, to keep the breed going.' Indeed, breeding and caring for pedigree dogs seems in many cases to be an ongoing challenge to maintain a reasonable state of wellbeing, rather than to reach a maximum state of health. In many breeds, struggles have reached the point where – in contrast to longstanding show-world ideologies – the preservation rather than the perfection of purebred forms of canine life has become the main goal.

### Maintaining Life

'You can come over,' Great Dane Breeder Tom agrees, somewhat reluctantly, at the end of our fourth telephone conversation. 'But make sure not to come before 11 am,' he warns me. 'And when you park your car, walk straight to the house, don't stand about or go over to see the dogs. Just come straight to the door.' Mindful of Tom's strict instructions, I set out at 10 am the next day on the two-hour drive to his house. As Tom predicts, my satnav takes me to the top of an unfinished lane which I follow for a further half-mile before spotting the wide

metal gate that closes off the entrance to a rutted mud track: a metal post box stand at one side, a sign warning couriers with larger deliveries to stay put and telephone the house. As promised, Tom has left the gate unlocked. After following his instructions to close it firmly behind me, I return to my car and drive up the track towards the sound of barking dogs.

As I pull up at the house, Tom is waiting on the front door-step to usher me inside. I walk hurriedly from the car, stealing a quick glance at the row of kennels where ten or twelve Great Danes stand tall on their hind legs, their front paws resting 6 feet high on the kennels' wire meshing. Once we are inside and the door is closed, Tom remains on edge. For more than a minute, I made awkward small-talk while he looks out of a window towards the kennels. 'OK, they're all settled,' he finally announces once the last of the dogs has lost interest and returned to all-fours. 'Now, welcome, welcome. Come in and let me tell you about the dogs.'



*Figure 30: A Great Dane being exhibited at a dog show.<sup>178</sup>*

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<sup>178</sup> By Томасина (Own work) [CC BY-SA 3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons.

Tom's concern, as he has already informed me over the phone, stems from the Great Dane's susceptibility to a condition called Gastric Dilatation-Volvulus (GDV), known more commonly among breeders as 'bloat'. The syndrome, as it is described in the veterinary literature, is 'characterised by rapid accumulation of air in the stomach, malposition of the stomach, increased intragastric pressure, and often, cardiogenic shock' (Glickman et al., 2000:40). In lay terms, the dog's stomach fills with gas and then twists, causing pressure to build-up inside the organ and cutting off the blood supply to the stomach and spleen. Once this happens, dogs quickly go into shock. If untreated, the condition is usually fatal (Watson & Tobias, 2006). Indeed, even with prompt and aggressive veterinary intervention, research suggests that bloat leads to death in up to 30% of cases (Glickman et al., 2000:44, Ward et al., 2003:324). Epidemiological studies of multiple breeds indicate that large, deep chested breeds including the Great Dane are those most likely to be affected by bloat (Glickman et al., 2000:40, Ward et al., 2003:320).

The lifetime risk of a Great Dane developing the condition is estimated to be as high as 42.4%, and bloat is reported to be the leading cause of death in the breed.<sup>179</sup> Yet some breeders, including Tom, claim that these figures are skewed due to the fact that many breeders are allegedly more willing to report cases of bloat than other serious conditions, especially those believed to be inheritable and thus morally problematic. Nonetheless, bloat causes grave concern in the breed. And, as becomes evident in my time spent with Tom, even the risk of bloat has a significant effect on the lives of both breeders and dogs. 'We try our best to keep the dogs calm after they've eaten,' Tom explains as we settle in the living room, 'which means we don't have people coming or going between 8 am, when the dogs are fed, and 11 [am]' As I had witnessed, the dogs are inclined to jump up at the fences of their kennels when visitors arrive, which is, Tom tells me 'bad

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[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AGreat\\_Dane\\_in\\_Tallinn.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AGreat_Dane_in_Tallinn.JPG) [retrieved 19/07/2016].

<sup>179</sup>'Understanding Canine Bloat for Better Treatment <http://cvm.msu.edu/about-the-college/news-and-events/news/understanding-bloat-for-better-treatment> [retrieved 07/02/2014]



for bloat, especially if they've just eaten,' hence the post-mealtime visiting restrictions. 'The same goes for night time,' he claims. 'We feed them at 6pm, so we don't have people over after that.' Luckily, Tom observes, he and his wife live on a large, rural property with no close neighbours, which makes it easier to keep the dogs calm, but, he tells me, 'we still need a big gate with a lock on so the postie doesn't wander in at the wrong time.'

It was not only the lack of neighbouring houses that attracted Tom to the property, though. 'This is a good spot for us to be in because we're only 15 minutes' drive from the emergency vet,' he claims with some pride. If he has a problem with one of the dogs, he hopes that this close proximity will allow him to reach the vet 'in time', although on the occasions when his wife is home alone, Tom worries she will be unable to lift one of the 80-kilogram male dogs into their van should the need arise. The downside of living on an isolated property, Tom observes, is the lack of neighbours who might help in an emergency. Hence, he tells me, 'We don't go out much at night. Evening is the worst time – that's when [cases of bloat] tend to happen, although it can be anytime, so we tend to stay in when we can.'

Tom knows all too well the risks of the disease. In the 25 years he has been breeding Great Danes, he has lost seven dogs to bloat. 'We nearly lost another one last week,' he informs me, 'but luckily my wife spotted it early and the vet was able to operate before it was too late.' As is standard procedure, Tom explains, the vet first used a needle to release the pressure from the dog's stomach, then opened the animal's abdomen and untwisted the stomach before permanently attaching the organ to the abdominal wall. This final procedure, known as a gastropexy, is intended to prevent the stomach from twisting if the organ should once again become dilated. The dog was lucky, Tom tells me. The vet observed that the organs were all in good condition, which is not always the case after cases of bloat:

‘Some of them, the vets get them on the operating table, but by the time they open them up, the organs have started to die off. We had one who had to have half her stomach removed because the blood supply had been cut off ... she still died six weeks later.’

Returning to the most recent incident, Tom offers to show me the dog in question – a young male not yet one year old. We leave the living room where we have been chatting and Tom ushers me through the kitchen towards a closed door. Putting his finger to his lips, he shows me into the darkened room, in the middle of which sits a cage some four feet high and five feet wide. In the cage, a huge, melancholy-looking Great Dane raises his head from where he lies on the floor. Tom hushes the dog as the two of us stand for a moment in silent observation before leaving as quietly as we entered. Once back in the kitchen, Tom explains that the animal has been in the cage for a week, being let out every two hours for toilet breaks. The dog has two more weeks of ‘complete rest’ ahead before he will start spending longer periods outside, under strict supervision, gradually re-building his strength. ‘Some people would let them out earlier, but you can’t be too careful,’ Tom warns. ‘We’ve made that mistake before, and I’m determined not to lose this one,’ he tells me. Then, with sudden renewed energy, Tom declaims: ‘He’s Champion quality.’

The excitement Tom obviously feels at the prospect of ‘making up’ a new Show Champion constitutes a marked departure from his general demeanour during this and subsequent visits. Tom is weary, I soon conclude and eventually he says as much himself: he is worn out by the ever-present anxiety of life with disease-prone dogs, not to mention the constant high-drama of show-world politics. Does he ever wish he had chosen an easier breed, I ask him on one occasion. No, he assures me. Life with another type of dog wouldn’t be as fulfilling. He is devoted to the Great Dane, and to ensuring that the breed survives long into the future. This type of commitment to pedigree dogs, he observes, takes a particular type of person, especially when it comes to caring for a ‘difficult’ breed like the Great Dane. He claims he is among the few willing and able to adapt to what he understands to be the needs of the breed, and he remains dedicated to

maintaining the breed in its current form, even, it seems, if this means that dogs will sometimes suffer.

Of course, not all breeders of Great Danes are lucky enough – by Tom’s standards – to live within close reach of an emergency vet. Dianne, a breeder in rural Wales who faces a forty-five minute drive to the nearest out-of-hours vet, tells me that:

‘We’ve had two dogs bloat before... we lost the second one. After that, we really thought hard about moving house to somewhere less remote ... Once you’ve lost a Dane to bloat, it’s something you don’t ever want to have to deal with again.’

Finding a new home suitable for both her and her dogs has proved difficult, so instead Dianne has prepared herself as best she can for a third incident of bloat. Opening the back doors of the van in which she transports her dogs, she draws my attention to a large plastic box labelled ‘Bloat Kit’, which, she tells me, she keeps near to hand at all times. Opening the kit, she shows me a piece of wooden dowel with a hole in the centre and a long plastic tube. The dowel is to be used as a bit, Dianne explains. Once it is between the dog’s jaws, ‘you feed the tube through the hole down the throat to try and release the gas that builds up in the stomach.’ The kit does not, however, guarantee relief, she tells me. A large dog in significant pain would be difficult to treat, and even if the tube can be successfully inserted, it will only allow the gas to escape if the stomach has not yet twisted. As a second option, the kit also contains a large hypodermic needle which Dianne acquired from her vet. As she explains:

‘In an emergency, we can put [the needle] through the ribs and into the stomach to try and release the pressure. If it came to it, it might buy us some time ... I know people who keep a large knitting-needle to hand in case the worst happens.’

How does Dianne feel about the prospect of performing field surgery on one of her dogs, I ask. ‘You think you wouldn’t be able to do it,’ she tells me, ‘but once you’ve seen how much pain they’re in when they get [bloat], you would do anything to relieve it.’ Her experience of the condition has obviously had a

profound effect on Dianne, but despite the potential heartbreak, she is adamant that the Great Dane is still the breed for her, even with the risk of bloat hanging over their lives. That said, she is hesitant when it comes to selling puppies to new owners who are not familiar with the consequences of the disease:

‘We’ve only sold a couple of puppies to people who hadn’t owned a Dane before. Both times, I just kept worrying that they wouldn’t be prepared or know what to do if the dog got bloat. You worry what you’re letting them in for... both the owners and the dogs.’

Dianne is not the only breeder to feel ambivalent about selling puppies. Yet although she worries about the dogs’ welfare, she tells me that ‘you can’t make too much of a fuss about bloat or other things, or people will think the breed has too many problems.’ There is always the risk, she and others observe, that disease will cause both dog and owner to suffer, but nonetheless, puppies have to be bred and sold to perpetuate the breed. Then again, Dianne realises, to perpetuate the breed is to perpetuate the risk of disease, and she claims to feel significant moral obligation to ensure that risk is kept to a minimum. Whenever possible, she tells me, she chooses experienced owners for her puppies, and even still she sends each puppy to its new home with a long list of instructions on how to prepare for a case of bloat, including advice on how to identify the early warning signs, as well as instructions to make contact with the local emergency vet in order to devise a plan of action should the worst ever happen.

New owners also leave Dianne’s house under strict instruction to keep their dogs calm. Much like Tom, Dianne acknowledges that the anatomy of the Great Dane makes it important for owners to refrain from rough-housing or boisterous behaviour which might cause the dogs to become over-excited. This is not only important in reducing the risk of bloat, Dianne observes, but also to ensure healthy bone development in the early months of life. Dogs of this size, she claims, are often over-exercised in their first year, which – given the rapid growth rates of large-breed puppies – can lead to significant problems with skeletal disease. As she observes, keeping a Great Dane healthy means keeping the animal calm and

restricting movement and exercise, particularly during periods when the dog's anatomy makes it particularly vulnerable to disease. The fact is – Dianne insists, echoing a common concern in 'large' and 'giant' breeds – that the specific characteristics of the dogs require owners to learn how to restrict certain types of activity which would otherwise pose a threat to the dogs' wellbeing. Yet while Dianne and her fellow breeders see such restrictions as good, responsible care, they claim that pet owners often struggle to understand that learning the limits of a breed is an essential aspect of looking after a pedigree dog.

Both Dianne and Tom recognise that, even with the best of intentions, providing breed-specific care for a Great Dane is not always easy. Few owners are able to tailor their lifestyles to the extent that these two breeders have done so. But when it comes to minimising the risk of death from bloat, veterinary medicine offers an alternative: prophylactic gastropexy surgery in which the dog's stomach is attached to the abdominal wall in order to stop the organ from twisting (see Watson & Tobias 2006). By 2012, the procedure has become a routine practice in the care of 'giant' breed dogs in the USA, and is offered by a number of UK vets. The advice from one established veterinary practice is that breeds including the Great Dane, St. Bernard, Irish Wolfhound and German Shepherd 'are susceptible [to bloat] and should be considered for the preventative procedure.'<sup>180</sup>

Yet prophylactic gastropexies are controversial, in the show-world as much as among vets. A decade earlier, concerns were already being raised by veterinary commentators about the ethics of the surgery, in particular about the question whether dogs that had undergone prophylactic surgery should be exhibited at dog shows or bred from (Ward et al., 2003:328). Previous veterinary studies of various large dog breeds indicate that chest size and width are genetically determined, the implication being that some animals are more prone to bloat than others, and also more likely to pass on this predisposition to their offspring (Schaible, 1997). If there is a hereditary element to bloat, veterinary critics ask,

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<sup>180</sup> Vets 4 Life (2014) 'Gastropexy' <http://www.vet4life.co.uk/key-hole-surgery/gastropexy/> [last accessed 08/02/2014]

would prophylactic gastropexy in breeding animals hide predisposition? If so, a surgery which might be considered good care for the individual dog might have a long-term detrimental effect on dogs of subsequent generations and, as some show-breeders argue, might also have a widespread detrimental effect on the breed. Yet although concerns about the use of anaesthesia discourage her from submitting her own dogs to the procedure, show-breeder Dianne is nonetheless sympathetic towards those who have done so, arguing that they shouldn't be penalised in the show-ring or when the time comes to breed from affected dogs. As she tells me:

'If they have a really good dog and feel that the risk is too great, then I can totally understand people doing that sort of surgery. I don't think it would be fair to say that they can't then breed from a dog just because they did what they thought was best for its health.'

Moreover, her experience of bloat in her own dogs – along with her knowledge of the condition in the wider breed – leads Dianne to believe that notions of genetic predisposition to bloat are misguided. 'We see it in too many lines,' she tells me. 'It's in pretty much every line out there, so, no: I don't agree with the suggestion that it's genetic. It's just in the breed.'

Encounters with other breeders of Great Danes reveal similar views. Bloat, like many other diseases, is understood as an unfortunate but unavoidable risk that comes with owning large, deep-chested dogs. While breeders like Dianne recognise that the conformation of their breeds predisposes Great Danes to the condition, the fact that this conformation is common to *all* dogs in that breed puts bloat in a category of disease which breeders do not view as being genetic. After all, they reason, genetic diseases are abnormalities: they affect a percentage of a population and can be weeded out via the use of screening programmes. On the other hand, the deep chest that veterinary science claims predisposes Great Danes to bloat is not viewed by breeders as an abnormality, but instead as a normal and desirable characteristic of the breed. As both Tom and Dianne seem to conclude, their responsibility as breeders is to maintain the breed in its

Standard-fitting form, while minimising the risk of ‘environmental factors’ leading to incidents of disease. Beyond this, their own agency is limited. As Tom tells me, ‘people get sick, dogs get sick – it’s just how nature works.’ Again, the underlying notion that nature, rather than show-world breeding practices, is the cause of disease exempts breeders from shouldering moral responsibility for incidents of the disease. Moreover, as veterinary procedures such as prophylactic gastropexy extend the agency of breeders to intervene and subdue the forces of nature, this extended agency introduces new possibilities to respond to the needs of their breeds and new responsibilities to provide care. However, the Great Dane with its giant, deep-chested body remains an object of virtu in the show world, and the project of maintaining life in this particular form remains a virtuous pursuit.

### The Cost of Maintaining Life

‘I’ve only [performed gastropexies on] dogs that have already had a gastric torsion,’<sup>181</sup> vet Jamie informs me when I raise the subject during a lunch-time conversation at his practice. ‘I can see the sense in doing it prophylactically,’ he continues, ‘I’d be happy never to have to deal with another torsion, and [a gastropexy] is a fairly straight-forward procedure.’ The main problem, Jamie suggests, is the money it would cost the dogs’ owners. Other vets advertise the procedure as costing between 800 and 1,000 pounds; a substantial sum, Jamie observes, and perhaps difficult to justify to the pet-insurance companies that now cover the cost of many expensive procedures performed on pedigree dogs. Most policies are issued on the basis that they don’t cover elective surgeries, Jamie points out, ‘although you’ll find a lot of vets are willing to work round that problem.’ Jamie claims to know of many in his profession who are willing to re-write disease-treatment narratives in order to help make treatment affordable and therefore accessible to owners. While cynical observers might point out that

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<sup>181</sup> The twisting of the stomach that often occurs in cases of bloat.

this also increases the income of vets, even Jamie himself – usually the first to point out the ethical inconsistencies in both dog breeding and veterinary practice – claims to see things differently:

‘It’s the same for any prophylactic intervention: there will always be some people who say it’s unnecessary and vets are just doing it for profit, but I don’t think any of us would do that ... We do what’s in the best interest of the dog. If you know an animal might suffer in the future, then you weigh the odds and decide whether or not it’s preferable to intervene before it gets to that point. With pedigree dogs, we know some breeds are very likely to have particular problems, which puts us in a good position to catch these things early or before they happen.’

Pet insurance might help to cover the cost in some cases, but, Jamie insists, the cost of this sort of care is something people must take into account when considering whether or not to take on a pedigree dog as a pet. One of his major concerns, he claims, is that:

‘Many breeders don’t seem to tell people who buy puppies that the cost of the puppy is more like a down-payment on the life they want to have with that dog: chances are, if you buy a Bulldog or a Great Dane or one of these other breeds that have been bred to extremes, there will be plenty more payments to make down the line.’

Breeders’ silence about disease is, he suggests, no doubt key in persuading members of the Public to buy pedigree dogs. After all, he asks, ‘how else would [breeders] convince anyone that getting a Great Dane or a Bulldog or whatever is a good idea?’ Either way, Jamie tells me, it is understandable that vets might be willing to re-write treatment narratives in order to silence certain facts and thus facilitate pet insurance claims. In his opinion, ‘You could well argue that just because the breeders don’t take responsibility, the owner shouldn’t have to shoulder the costs of treatment.’

The ongoing costs of pedigree dog ownership are a problem that one of Jamie’s clients, in particular, is all too familiar with. Sarah, together with her husband, has



owned and exhibited Mastiffs for over twelve years, keeping two or three dogs at a time and always seeking out reputable show-breeders when looking for a new puppy. Although the couple has chosen only to keep male dogs and thus have not bred a litter themselves, they are active members of the dog showing community and have, on several occasions, allowed other breeders to use their male dogs at stud, something which, Sarah tells me, helps to cover the cost of caring for the expensive giant dogs. 'We have a saying in this breed,' she reports the first time we meet in the waiting room of the veterinary surgery. 'We say: "A Mastiff will break your heart and your bank." It's true, on both counts.' In their twelve years in the breed, the couple have owned a total of seven dogs, only one of whom survived into his seventh year. 'We spend a lot of time at the vets,' she observes with a rueful smile. Putting an arm around the neck of the enormous Mastiff who sits, docile, at her side, Sarah tells me somewhat apologetically that, 'The trouble is, once you fall in love with this breed, you can't imagine being without them.'



*Figure 31: An English Mastiff.<sup>182</sup>*

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<sup>182</sup> Photo by Claudio Gennari. Under licence from Flickr Creative Commons.  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/claudiogennari/> [Retrieved 19/07/2016]

The breed is victim to a long list of health problems, Sarah informs me as she waits for Jamie to call her in to the consulting room. Some, like hip and elbow dysplasia, heart problems, epilepsy, kidney and bladder stones, and neurological disease are serious, she observes, and require significant and costly veterinary intervention. Other issues, Sarah suggests, are 'just things you have to learn to live with.' As she points out with reference to her own dog:

'Mastiffs get elbow sores known as bursas. It's a growth on the elbow they get from lying down on the floor. The weight of the dog puts pressure on the elbows ... You can buy elbow pads to help reduce the problem, but it's just one of those things; annoying, but it's not going to kill them.'

Indeed, like the Great Dane, many of the Mastiff's problems are widely understood to result from the excessive size and weight of the dogs, something that Sarah is apparently aware of. Much more candid than most other show-breeders, she tells me that:

'I shouldn't say this, but it tends to be the lighter dogs – poorly built in terms of the show standard – that live longest, and probably have the best quality of life.'

On this occasion, Sarah has come to the surgery to talk about the possibility of a second elbow replacement for her two-and-a-half year-old Mastiff, Hamish. When he was 18 months old, x-rays showed that Hamish was suffering from severe dysplasia in both his elbows. His left elbow was successfully replaced at a specialist veterinary hospital seven months previous, and the time has now come, Sarah tells me, to seek a referral for the second procedure. Both Sarah and vet Jamie agree that elbow and hip dysplasia are significant problems in giant breeds like the Mastiff, mainly due to the strain placed on the joints by the dog's sheer weight. As Sarah reports, joint replacements have become routine procedures in recent years, and, she claims, have significantly increased the length and quality of the lives of Mastiffs who would otherwise have suffered significant distress and possibly been euthanised at a young age.

The downside is that joint replacement procedures are expensive. Hamish's first elbow replacement cost over £5,000, and the bill for the second will be similarly high. Thankfully, Sarah tells me, all her Mastiffs are insured, so the upfront cost of the procedures is covered by her insurance providers. 'Otherwise,' she tells me, 'we couldn't afford to keep these dogs. I don't know how anyone could.' Having recently totalled up their veterinary care expenditure, Sarah tells me she was shocked to find that the total comes to almost £40,000 over 12 years. 'And we've been relatively lucky with health,' she claims. Before Hamish, only two of their other dogs required elbow surgery, and one a bilateral hip replacement. Her other dogs have all undergone surgery at some point, but, she tells me, 'nothing quite as big or expensive'. The monthly insurance premiums are not cheap – Sarah says she is paying £143 per month to insure two dogs – but they offer protection from large bills that she would otherwise be unable to pay. 'Oh yes – we thank God for pet insurance,' she concludes. 'Like Hamish's breeder says, it's pretty much the only way this breed is kept going.'

Sarah is not the only member of the show-world to suggest to me that pet insurance is a lifeline for their breeds. Not only does insurance make the keeping and breeding of dogs like Mastiffs financially viable, others also note that insurance allows breeders and owners to improve the health of dogs who would otherwise not be available for breeding. As Sarah explains, in a breed where numbers are already low – averaging less than 200 registrations per year – it is vital to ensure as many dogs and bitches as possible contribute to the future of the breed. Hamish in particular, Sarah claims, is important to the future of the breed. 'His breeders think he's lovely,' she tells me. 'He's got very good breed type, not like some you see today which are very far from what the Breed Standard describes.' When I ask whether the Kennel Club thinks it advisable to breed from a dog with dysplastic elbows, Sarah echoes the words of many other breeders in the show-world, pointing out that the cause of elbow dysplasia remains unclear. Like other breeders, she claims that many incidents, including Hamish's, were likely to be the result of environmental rather than genetic factors; perhaps excessive exercise at a young age, or a dog's natural tendency to bounce up and

down as a puppy. Yet even if the disease is genetic, Sarah claims that the condition is polygenic and complex; there is no simple pattern of inheritance and – in Sarah’s words – ‘no way of knowing what nature will produce.’ With little evidence to prove that breeding from Hamish would inevitably lead to dysplasia in his puppies, Sarah agrees with other breeders’ suggestions that it is more important to capitalise on Hamish’s many positive qualities, rather than speculate about the negative ones. Breed health can be improved, Sarah points out, but that is a long-term goal: first, the task of responsible, caring breeders is to ensure that the breed survives long enough.

For vets like Jamie and pedigree-dog owners like Sarah, pet insurance has significantly extended the possibilities of care, even if there is not always clear consensus as to how care contributes to the good of dog and breed. Care, as Annemarie Mol and colleagues have suggested, often involves seeking a compromise between different ‘goods’ (Mol et al., 2010), and as such is often a process of ‘persistent tinkering in a world full of complex ambivalence and shifting tensions,’ rather than a definite, clear-cut solution to either practical or ethical concerns (2010:14). What is more, they argue, these compromises are not necessarily achieved through verbal negotiations, but are ‘a matter of practical tinkering, of attentive experimentation’ (Mol et al., 2010:13). Certainly, not every negotiation of care in the kennel or in the clinic involves a verbal acknowledgement, or attempts to verbally reconcile two opposite points of view. In the case of Jamie and Sarah, what both vet and client seem to implicitly agree is that the subject of breeding is not to be discussed in the clinical encounter. When I later ask why she didn’t mention to Jamie her hopes for Hamish’s future career as a stud dog, Sarah informs me that, in her experience, vets rarely understand the complexities of show-breeders’ responsibilities to maintain their breeds. Jamie knows Hamish as a dog with elbow disease, Sarah tells me: this view of the dog will likely obscure his view of the animal’s significance with regard to the wider breed.

From my knowledge of Jamie's views on dog breeding, I would have to say that Sarah is probably right. Yet his desire to intervene in breeding decisions seems to be limited. He has learned from experience, he tells me, that entering into debates about the ethics of breeding pedigree dogs is futile. Consequently, like the majority of other vets I speak to, Jamie sees his job as caring for the wellbeing of the animal in front of him in the clinic. This is not to say that breeding practices are not a concern; as he explains several times, Jamie views breeders' focus on their breeds as detrimental to the wellbeing of their individual dogs. Ultimately, Jamie acknowledges, their different understandings of health make it difficult for him and his pedigree-dog breeding clients to discuss dogs in the context of their breeds. Like show-world practices, care in veterinary contexts entails separations and distances, as John Law notes, largely due to the multiplicity of objects being cared for, and the fact that 'the coherence, consistency, and compatibility of the practices of care for those objects is chronically uncertain' (Law, 2010:67). Yet this uncertainty, as I have argued, is often ignored or rendered irrelevant by means of a careful avoidance of discussions which would bring to the surface certain incommensurable ethical obstacles. So, instead of being discussed, 'negotiations' of care are worked out in practice in the veterinary clinic and in the show-ring, much like care itself. The result is that many things remain unsaid by both veterinary and show-world carers, leaving each to attend to their respective responsibilities to care for the wellbeing of pedigree dogs and their breeds in partial – and occasionally deliberate – ignorance of the other carer's information and intention.

## Conclusion

The silence in the room where Tom's 'Champion quality' Great Dane lay in recovery stayed with me for many days after my visit to the house, and led me to ask myself many questions: Did the care the dog was given by his breeder allow the animal to 'speak back', to use Isabel Stengers's (2007) terms? Perhaps, I thought, the incident of bloat that led to his surgery and subsequent confinement was a case of a canine body speaking in protest against generations of show-

world practices and cultivation of the enormous bodies which now typified the breed. Putting aside the question of first cause, is the practice of prophylactic gastropexy surgery good care or merely a strategy by which protesting bodies can be silenced? And was the silence in which Tom and I stood merely complicity and failure, or was it a means of upholding our responsibilities to care for the multiple interests of the dogs, breeders, breeds, and histories brought together in the body of the dog? Ultimately, if our silence was good care, who or what were we caring for, and how, exactly, was it good?

That there seem to be no straightforward answers to these questions arguably tells us much about the ethics of care in both the show world and veterinary practice. For one thing, as Annemarie Mol and her colleagues recognise, 'care is attentive to ... suffering and pain, but it does not dream up a world without it' (2010:14). This, to me, sums up care in the show-world, where breeders' understandings of their limited agency mean that the project of protecting 'the good of the breed' comes with an acceptance that suffering is an inevitable part of life. Yet as Alasdair MacIntyre suggests:

'If we begin by asking for an account of goodness which is compatible with the good man suffering any degree of torture or injustice, the whole perspective of our ethics will be different from that of an ethics which begins from asking in what form of life doing well and faring well may be found together. The first perspective will end up with an ethics which is irrelevant to the task of creating such a form of life. Our choice between these two perspectives is the choice between an ethics which is engaged in telling us how to endure a society in which the just man is crucified and an ethics which is concerned with how to create a society in which this no longer happens' (MacIntyre 1967:58).

The ethics of care in the show-world, much like that in veterinary practice, then, accepts the risk of suffering, yet it is an ethics which nonetheless finds virtue in this acceptance. In both cases, I argue, recognition of suffering and risk is key to responsible practice, enabling breeders and vets to balance the needs of multiple objects of care.

In the show-world, where Standard-fitting bodies are the measure of aesthetic and moral virtue, and where breeders understand their agency to be limited by the forces of nature, prophylactic interventions – which prevent breed-specific norms from becoming pathologies – fit easily into concepts of good, responsible care. In veterinary practice, where vets see their own actions as limited by their professional responsibilities to care for dogs, clients, livelihoods, and indeed themselves, they present prophylactic and pre-emptive treatments as means of balancing and minimising suffering before the problems extend beyond veterinary control. In both cases, then, care is instrumental, but whether or not this instrumentality is seen to be a problem depends, I argue, on who or what is taken to be the primary object of care. In a sense, veterinary care is another strategy for the silencing of canine bodies: analogous to Georges Canguilhem's (1989) observation that health is the silence of the organs, breed health can arguably be seen as the silence of the bodies of dogs. Yet whether this silencing constitutes good care, and whether this care is more or less 'innocent' – to use Haraway's (2008) terms – in relation to suffering, again depends on the concept of health and the perspective of the observer.

As I have argued throughout this thesis, breeders see the positive potential of their care practices as limited by the forces of nature, as indeed do vets. Drawing once again on Laidlaw's work, I have argued here that this understanding of limited human agency comes with an understanding of limited responsibility for certain forms of suffering. And while veterinary concepts of health may bring with them different concepts of agency and responsibility, I have argued that, in practice, these tensions are not always immediately present in interactions between breeders and vets. Rather, vets and breeders often find space to work around and negotiate tensions – frequently in the silencing of practice-specific understandings of agency, significance, and responsibility – in ways that allow both to engage in what they understand to be good, virtuous forms of care.

## Chapter Eight – Conclusion

In June 2015, after four years at the helm, veterinary Professor Steve Dean was ousted from his post as Chairman of the Kennel Club. The removal of an incumbent chairman was unprecedented in the organisation's history, and yet it was no doubt anticipated by many among the club's membership who had been publically expressing their discontent for some weeks. Under Professor Dean's leadership, the actions of the Kennel Club were felt to have been 'out of touch' with the views of its members, *Dog World* reports.<sup>183</sup> His tenure may not have brought radical changes in as far as critics of the show-world were concerned, but to many of the traditionalist breeders who make up the Kennel Club's membership, Professor Dean had taken things several steps too far. Reflecting on Dean's tenure, show-world critic Kevin Colwill wrote that:

‘The defining moment of the Steve dean era came very early on, Crufts 2012. Six of the original 15 ‘high profile’ breeds failed their post judging veterinary inspection, creating a storm of controversy his chairmanship never recovered from. Many stalwarts of the dog showing community regarded it as an insult to the breeders and exhibitors who put the dogs in the ring and to the judges who placed them above their peers. There was palpable anger and frustration every time a mere vet prevented the dog deemed best of its breed from progressing to the group judging.’<sup>184</sup>

Professor Dean's leadership had been compromised throughout, many agree, by his willingness to pander to veterinary ideals, rather than stand up for show-world values and traditions. As one well-known judge argued, ‘for far too many

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<sup>183</sup> *Dog World* (02/06/2015) ‘New KC Chairman Elected’

[http://www.dogworld.co.uk/product.php/137583/1/new\\_kc\\_chairman\\_elected](http://www.dogworld.co.uk/product.php/137583/1/new_kc_chairman_elected) [accessed 12/05/2016]

<sup>184</sup> Colwill, K. (26/06/2015) ‘Alternative Viewpoint: A Spring Clean at Clarges Street.’ In *Dog World*.

[http://www.dogworld.co.uk/product.php/139057/1/a\\_spring\\_clean\\_at\\_clarges\\_street\\_by\\_kevin\\_colwill](http://www.dogworld.co.uk/product.php/139057/1/a_spring_clean_at_clarges_street_by_kevin_colwill) [accessed 12/05/2016]

It seems worth pointing out that Mr Colwill is one of the very few dissenting voices given a platform in the show-world press. His occasional ‘Alternative Viewpoint’ columns in *Dog World* are just that, and not in keeping with general sentiment in the pedigree dog showing community.



years a policy of defence had been followed rather than to attack our critics.’<sup>185</sup> The Kennel Club’s members celebrated the announcement that Professor Dean had been replaced by Simon Luxmoore, who, as another well-known judge and *Dog World* columnist observed, ‘is very much ‘one of us’, [and] comes with no conflicts of interest.’ The challenges Professor Dean’s tenure left for Mr Luxmoore are ‘unenviable’, the same commentator suggested, but, as he seemed relieved to tell his readers, ‘for the first time in many years I feel highly optimistic about the future of our governing body.’<sup>186</sup> The sentiment was echoed in the comments made by countless Kennel Club members and writers in the show-world press: at long last, the show-world has a leader who will attend to the needs of breeders of pedigree dogs, rather than bow to the opinions of vets.

In the years since my fieldwork, the controversy surrounding dog-showing has continued, most notably at Crufts. In 2014, the Best of Breed-winning Basset Hound passed a vet check despite exhibiting marked ectropion. As Jemima Harrison noted on her *Pedigree Dogs Exposed* blog, the Kennel Club’s official guidelines left the judge no other choice: ‘if [the dog’s eyes] weren’t obviously sore on the day, the rules state that the vet has to pass her.’<sup>187</sup> In 2015, the show was marred by two different controversies which hit the headlines: first, the apparent poisoning of an Irish Setter which some suspect was motivated by a growing resentment towards the increasing number of foreign dogs competing in the show.<sup>188</sup> Secondly, the handler of the Best in Show-winning Scottish Terrier caused a public outcry when she was filmed lifting the dog up by its tail and neck.

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<sup>185</sup> Lanning, J. Quoted in *Dog World* (02/06/2015) (ibid).

<sup>186</sup> Brace, A., quoted in *Dog World* (02/06/2015) ‘New KC Chairman Elected.’ [http://www.dogworld.co.uk/product.php/137583/1/new\\_kc\\_chairman\\_elected](http://www.dogworld.co.uk/product.php/137583/1/new_kc_chairman_elected) [accessed 26/06/2015]

<sup>187</sup> Harrison, J. (08/03/2014) ‘Crufts 2014 – Best of Breed Basset Hound’ <http://pedigreedogsexposed.blogspot.co.uk/2014/03/crufts-2014-best-of-breed-basset-hound.html> [accessed 13/06/2016].

<sup>188</sup> See Bagot, M. (08/03/2015) ‘Crufts Suspected Poisoning.’ <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/crufts-suspected-poisoning-cops-investigating-5294375> [accessed 13/06/2016].

Also, Crookes, D. (09/03/2015) ‘Crufts 2015: Why Irish Setter Jagger may have been poisoned.’ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/31802692/crufts-2015-why-irish-setter-jagger-may-have-been-poisoned> [accessed 13/06/2015]

Within two days, an online petition requesting that the Kennel Club strip the dog and handler of the title gathered over 100,000 signatures.<sup>189</sup> Somewhat unhelpfully, the handler appeared unrepentant in interviews with the press, telling *Dog World* that, 'People can take it how they want, but I'm taking no notice because no one's going to take this win away from me.'<sup>190</sup>



Figure 32: A screen-grab showing handler Rebecca Cross lifting the Best in Show-winning Scottish Terrier at Crufts 2015.<sup>191</sup>

A year later, in 2016, Crufts is again the centre of controversy, this time due to a Best of Breed-winning German Shepherd whose movement appeared hobbled by

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<sup>189</sup> 38 Degrees (2015) 'Strip Rebecca Cross of her Best in Show win at Crufts 2015.' <https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/strip-rebecca-cross-of-her-best-in-show-win-at-crufts-2015-for-harsh-handling> [accessed 11/03/2015].

<sup>190</sup> *Dog World* (09/03/2015) 'Crufts BIS Handler under Fire after Tail Lift.' [http://www.dogworld.co.uk/product.php/132296/1/crufts\\_bis\\_handler\\_under\\_fire\\_after\\_tail\\_lift](http://www.dogworld.co.uk/product.php/132296/1/crufts_bis_handler_under_fire_after_tail_lift) [accessed 13/06/2016].

<sup>191</sup> Photo from *Dogworld* (28/04/2015) 'KC Acts on "Tailgait."' [http://www.dogworld.co.uk/product.php/135350/1/kc\\_acts\\_on\\_%E2%80%98tailgate%E2%80%99](http://www.dogworld.co.uk/product.php/135350/1/kc_acts_on_%E2%80%98tailgate%E2%80%99) [Retrieved 15/06/2016]

the extreme slope of her back. Despite the fact that the bitch had passed her vet check, even the Kennel Club admitted she should not have won the title and cut footage of the animal moving around the ring from its Best in Show coverage. Yet as Jemima Harrison pointed out on her *Pedigree Dogs Exposed* blog, this was not the first time the bitch had been awarded high honours in the show ring. Harrison posted a long list of titles the Shepherd had previously won, along with comments made by the awarding judges who noted that the animal's movement 'was really excellent',<sup>192</sup> so excellent it seems that they singled her out as 'a female who deserves the highest of accolades.'<sup>193</sup>



Figure 33: The Best of Breeding-winning German Shepherd at Crufts 2016.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Armstrong, W. quoted in Harrison, J. (2016) 'Crufts 2016: Kc admits GSD shouldn't have won.... But...' <http://pedigreedogsexposed.blogspot.co.uk/2016/03/crufts-2016-kc-admits-gsd-shouldnt-have.html> [accessed 14/05/2016].

<sup>193</sup> Hall, S. quoted in Harrison, J. (2016) (ibid.)

<sup>194</sup> Photo from *The Independent*, (14/03/2016) 'Crufts 2016'.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/crufts-2016-german-shepherd-best-of-breed-owner-responds-to-horrendous-comments-amid-animal-cruelty-a6931291.html> [Retrieved 19/07/2016].

In an open letter to Cruft organisers, the RSPCA said that it felt encouraged by the Kennel Club's acknowledgement that the German Shepherd in question should not have won. However:

'Since 2009, four reports on the welfare problems associated with dog breeding have been published in the UK and the issue remains very much a major welfare concern.'<sup>195</sup>

As the RSPCA argued, the German Shepherd was not the only example of obvious health problems afflicting winning dogs at this year's show. In particular, they highlighted concerns that a well-known Pekingese – Yakee Ooh Ahh Cantona, or 'Eric' to his friends – seemed to be struggling for breath and 'reluctant to exercise', yet the dog won not only Best of Breed but also the top prize in the wider Toy Group. As Jemima Harrison was quick to point out, Eric's owners are no strangers to Crufts controversy. They had also bred and exhibited the 2003 Best in Show-winning Pekingese – Yakee A Dangerous Liaison, or 'Danny' – who was later revealed to have had surgery to relieve brachycephalic obstructed airway syndrome before the competition, and needed to sit on an ice pack during the awards ceremony to stop his thickly-coated body from overheating. As Harrison pointed out, Eric, the 2016 winner, is one of Danny's 49 offspring, and since his triumph at Crufts, Eric has already sired 59 puppies in 22 litters. As Harrison further noted, despite the fact that the Pekingese remains on the Kennel Club's list of High Profile Breeds, the dogs are not subject to any compulsory health testing, and neither Danny nor Eric are listed as having passed any health tests on the Kennel Club's database.<sup>196</sup>

The reaction from the show-world was largely defensive, many claiming that the German Shepherd was simply moving in an unnatural fashion because she was anxious, rather than incapable of moving naturally due to her poor confirmation.

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<sup>195</sup> RSPCA (15/03/2016) 'Open Letter to Crufts 2016'  
<https://blogs.rspca.org.uk/insights/2016/03/15/open-letter-to-crufts-2016/#.V3OizPkrLDc>  
[accessed 15/06/2016].

<sup>196</sup> Harrison, J. (2016) (ibid)

As for the Pekingese, a well-known judge and show-world commentator concluded that Harrison's reporting on the issue was 'inexcusably rude'. Allegedly she failed to notice that 'Eric has been winning CCs for six consecutive years.' Eight years on from 2008's *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*, it seems that little has changed in terms of the show-world's understanding of health: a Breed Standard-fitting, show-winning pedigree dog is still what counts as a healthy pedigree dog.



Figure 34: Eric, or Yakee Ooh Ahh Cantona, Pekingese Best of Breed and Toy Group winner at Crufts 2016.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Photo from EMPICS Entertainment, featured in *The Telegraph* (14/03/2015) 'Meet Eric, the Tiny Pekingese at Crufts who stole the Nation's Heart.'

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/howaboutthat/12193067/Meet-Eric-the-tiny-Pekingese-at-Crufts-who-stole-the-nations-heart.html> [Retrieved 15/06/2016]



In this thesis, I have argued that pedigree dog breeders and vets use the term 'health' to refer to very different things. In the show world, a healthy dog is one which fits with the idealised image of the breed as described in the Breed Standard, an image of health which refers to the supposed original function of the breed as defined in retrospective accounts of the breed's history. This view is contrasted with veterinary notions of the healthy canine body as one in which pathology is absent, this absence often being affirmed through normative assessment and testing procedures which themselves refer to standardised notions of health. In the show-world, differences between breeds are celebrated, yet within each breed, practices which promote either physical or genetic diversity are discouraged. In contrast, the view from veterinary medicine is that the exaggerated physical differences between breeds are the cause of pathology, as is the limited genetic diversity that typifies breed populations. In short, what is considered normal and healthy in the context of one practice is often considered abnormal and pathological in the context of the other. My argument is that both canine bodies and the terms used to evaluate them can signify radically different things to vets and to show-breeders, so much so that their health-related discord is not simply a matter of confusion or disagreement about a shared concept of canine health. As I have argued, it is much rather the product of two conceptual systems which are fundamentally different, two systems which exhort the proponents of show-world and veterinary health ideals to engage in fundamentally different practices and distance themselves even further from one another by espousing two fundamentally different concepts of responsibility, ethics, and care.

At the heart of my argument is the understanding that virtue is found in specific, skilful performance of established practices (Macintyre, 1981; Lambek, 2010; Laidlaw, 2014). As Michael Lambek has observed, ethics is often tacit and subsumed in ordinary, everyday life, yet I have argued that in the show-world, conflicts between different concepts of health result in a continual questioning of

just how virtuous the related care practices really are. The stakes are high, particularly as the ethical personhood of breeders and vets is contingent on the perceived virtue of their practice. As my work has shown, though, the virtue of particular practices is not a matter of universal consensus, and despite the fact that both aim to promote the production of 'healthy' canine bodies, veterinary and show-world practice relate to fundamentally different understandings of what constitutes health and how it is best achieved. I have argued that, unlike veterinary medicine, show-world practice supports the view commonly held among breeders that hope for the future lies in a return to an idealised version of the past. This 'temporal anteriority', as Cassidy (2009) has referred to such hopeful nostalgia, is made most evident in the show-world notion that the virtue of days gone by can be brought back into the present, both through the skilled channelling of canine blood and the skilled recreation of the ideal breed specimen. In both cases, I argue, the virtue and virtuosity of breeders' practice is made evident in visual form; in the Standard-fitting bodies of pedigree dogs and in the written pedigrees with which they are associated. Breeders 'read' both of these with reference to the past, and, importantly, with reference to the dog as a member of a breed, rather than as an individual. In recognising the difference between show-world concern for dogs as breed members and veterinary concern for individuals, I hope to have demonstrated that – broadly speaking – the two practices focus on different objects of care.

Informed by Donna Haraway's (2008) work, I have argued that in the show-world, pedigree dogs assume both material and moral significance as members of their breeds. In other words, particular dogs hold ethical significance *because* they are members of their breeds, and breeds hold significance because they allow breeders to encounter particular animals as pedigree dogs. Yet while both dog and breed matter in the context of these connections, breeders often struggle to communicate a clear ethical position which spans these different levels of engagement. Crucially, from a show-world perspective, the health of a pedigree dog can only be assessed vis-à-vis its membership of a particular breed and that breed's original function. Few pedigree dog breeds were developed as pets, and

in the view of show-world traditionalists, the animals should not be expected to fare well in the average pet home. Neither were pedigree dogs developed as show-dogs, many breeders point out, and it is not surprising that dogs like the German Shepherd or Pekingese – which caused so much controversy at Crufts 2016 – do not appear to move or breathe comfortably in an ‘unnatural’, stressful context. The point is that responsible breeding and judging take account of the dog-as-breed-member.

Veterinary medicine, by contrast, focuses primarily on the dog as an individual. The vets I worked with did not differently evaluate features as normal or pathological in light of the dog’s breed, and a high hip score, for example, was taken to indicate pathology whether the dog in question was a Labrador or an Otterhound. Indeed, from a veterinary perspective, the way in which breeders view their dogs first and foremost as breed members obscures their view of the needs of the individual, and show-world concern for breeds is seen by vets as a major obstacle to providing good care. In contrast, breeders tend to argue that it is only due to their ability to know pedigree dogs as members of their breeds that they were able to care well for their specific animals as well as for the collective. According to this show-world rationale, it is the view of dogs as individuals rather than as breed members – i.e. the view held by vets and pet owners – that often proves problematic, as it eclipses the superior health concerns of the breed. So, while vets tend to blame a breeder’s focus on the breed for obscuring essential criteria of individual welfare, breeders tend to counter that the veterinary view of dogs as individuals blinds them to the needs of pedigree dogs as members of breeds.

So, rather than having to reconcile a tension between care for dog and care for breed, my work reveals how, in the traditions of the show-world, good care for a breed is good care for its members, and vice versa. This mutually beneficial relationship, however, is predicated on breeders’ abilities to recognise and attend to specific needs. Simultaneously caring well for pedigree dogs and breeds demands and in turn develops particular forms of connective attunement and



responsive attention, all of which are enacted through practices that differ markedly from those which typify relations between owners and pets. Here, I argue that in the show-world, 'good' care is defined as care that attends to the needs of both pedigree dogs and breeds, and it does so to the point at which connections between dog and breed are sites of mutual benefit, rather than tension. The understanding is that responsible, careful breeding practice produces Breed Standard-fitting dogs, and in time ensures consistency in the breed-as-population-of-dogs and health in the dog-as-breed-member.

As I hope to have shown, this simultaneous care requires a particular set of practical skills. By examining these, my work reinforces the argument that care is both moral and embodied (Mol et al, 2010). In particular, I have focused on the link between virtue – in the sense of moral righteousness – and virtuosity – in the sense of practical skill – which defines show-world practices of care, chief among them the ability to visually appraise the bodies of dogs in line with the idealised image of the breed as described in its Breed Standard. Building on arguments which link the development of visual skill to the relationship between proximity and perspective (Grasseni, 2004, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c; Willerslev, 2007; Candea, 2010), I have argued that show-breeders' skilled vision relies on the careful maintenance of an appropriate affective distance from both dog and breed. If a breeder becomes too absorbed in either, her perspective is expected to be altered and imbalanced, as a result of which she will attend to one in ways potentially harmful to the other. Yet while oversentimentality is seen as detrimental to breeders' practice, an appropriate level of engagement and fine-tuned relational sensibility are nonetheless crucial in the development of skilled vision and good judgement. To be clear, in the tradition of the show-world, good care does not involve balancing the conflicting needs of pedigree dogs and breeds. Rather, when care is performed well, the needs of the two are perfectly attuned. Only through a loss of perspective and a failure to hold both dogs and breed at an appropriate distance does the provision of care to one or the other become an issue.

Holding both dogs and breed at this affective distance is particularly important in traditional show-world practice, I have argued, because good care for pedigree dogs and breeds at times involves practices which might be seen as harmful were the focus on individuals. Here, I have built on arguments advanced by John Law (2010) and Hans Harbers (2010) to argue that the practice of culling non-Standard dogs can be viewed, not as care for the breed at the expense of the individual, but as good care for both the breed and the dogs in question. A breeder's ability to perform practices like culling again directs critical attention to the specific objects on which show world care practices focus. Here, the relation between caring *for* and caring *about* comes to the fore, as I return to the argument that, according to show-world tradition, good breeders care about and for dogs as breed members. Their apparent disregard for non-Standard dogs as individual, subjective beings is arguably symptomatic of the fact that breeders learn about dogs by engaging in show-world practices, in the course of which they come to attribute significance to dogs as pedigreed members of their respective breeds. To put it simply, in this context, dogs hold little significance as individuals. My point here is that, in the show-world, dogs are cared for as pedigree dogs. Those who do not meet with Breed Standards and thus effectively do not count as members of breeds cannot be guaranteed good care, and by this logic culling becomes an act of mercy, a way not of inflicting unnecessary cruelty but of minimising the inevitable neglect and pain the dog would suffer later in life due to its perceived imperfection. Thus, my argument returns to the complex emotional and intellectual dynamic by which breeders can engage in 'harmful' care practices such as culling as long as they hold both dogs and breeds at a distance so as to prevent problematic affective relations from compromising their professional judgment.

In turn, this ability to create distance relates to a wider argument about how responsibility is accorded when it comes to incidents of disease or abnormal developments in the bodies of particular dogs. Here, I have drawn on the work of Bruno Latour (2005) and James Laidlaw (2010) to argue that, while breeders claim credit for the cultivation of positive features in their dogs, the widespread

understanding among show-world traditionalists is that the force of nature is a competing, active agent in the shaping of canine bodies. Breeders are keen to claim that the skilful among them are able to tame and channel this erratic force to a positive, aesthetically pleasing effect. At times, however, their best efforts are defeated by nature's force of disorder – her unpredictable way of acting independently and counteracting the will of breeders – and this, as they see things, is when disease emerges.

As Laidlaw argues, with the attribution of independent agency comes the attribution of responsibility, meaning that the show-world notion of nature as an active force that brings about disease exempts breeders from responsibility for such negative events, events which are simply seen to be outwith their control. Here, it is worth reiterating that the effects of nature are not always considered 'natural' in the show-world. Instead, the term 'natural' is used interchangeably with the term 'good', blurring any conceptual boundaries between the physical and moral qualities of dogs and practices. Addressing these ambiguities, my work contributes to discussions about perceptions of nature which have recently been revitalised by engagements with the question of ethics, which asks us to consider how the definition or redefinition of nature 'allow[s] subjects... to differentiate their position, animate claims to good or bad behaviour, and "refigure the kinds of persons we might be"' (Reed, 2015:3, c.f. Haraway, 1991:3). My argument here is that the show-world understanding of nature, according to which nature maintains a partial hold over canine bodies, encourages a particular emotional pragmatism among breeders. It also limits the attribution of material and moral significance – and with these, breeders' responsibility – and this once again supports the need to resist the development of close affective relations with particular dogs. More fundamentally, I have argued that the show-world notion of nature's meddling control of the canine body is crucial in the attribution of goodness and virtue to traditional show world practice, and thus to breeders themselves.

This deflection of responsibility notwithstanding, the appearance of disease in the show-world is still morally problematic. It is important to note, however, that breeders do not see disease in and of itself as a problem; most breeders claim a willingness to accept disease as an inevitable part of life. Breeding from affected animals, though, remains controversial, since knowledge of an existing problem redistributes agency and responsibility from nature to breeders, and hence troubles the virtuosity of the breeders' practice. Yet not all breeders agree that an incident of disease is reason enough to exclude a dog from a breeding programme, and by general – if unwritten – consensus, such a decision is to be made privately and by the breeder alone. Consequently, I argue, it is not disease in and of itself which is a problem in the show-world, but rather disease made public. And due to the fact that dogs – and through them their breeders – are inextricably linked to one another by way of the animals' pedigrees, news of disease is not only problematic for the owner of the affected animal, but also for other members of the breed. The attribution of agency to 'nature' does mean that breeders are not held responsible for incidents of disease, but they are held responsible for ensuring that news of disease is kept quiet. In the tradition of the show-world, then, breeders who take their responsibilities seriously do not talk about disease, and as I have argued, silence is a highly valued aspect of good care.

Extending this line of argument, I have shown how uncomfortably people, dogs, and practices fit within the confines of the show-world when they break the unofficial code of silence placed upon incidents of disease. Yet while many breeders work hard to keep news of disease quiet, Kennel Club-sanctioned veterinary health testing schemes do just the opposite by making news of disease public. At times, I therefore suggest, remaining silent is not enough to ensure the virtue of show-world practice, so the deliberate cultivation of ignorance likewise becomes an important strategy of protection, preservation, and care. Yet while health testing schemes may pressure breeders to publically confront disease, I argue that care is often much more flexible and adaptive when show-world and veterinary practice meet in the clinic. Like Mol et al, (2010), Harbers (2010), and Law (2010), I argue that good care often involves improvisation rather than

adherence to any fixed definition of 'good'. Moreover, in both veterinary and show-world practice, care does not always aim to return the canine body to a state of perfect health. It is, much rather, practiced in the hope of simply maintaining valued forms of life (see also Mol et al, 2010). The realities of caring for pedigree dogs oblige both vets and breeders to pick pragmatism over idealism, yet it seems that the tempering of ambition, along with a willingness to allow certain unpalatable things to remain unsaid, enables breeders as well as vets to find workable solutions and provide mutually acceptable forms of care.

In her work on violence and care, Lisa Stevenson has argued that recent anthropological attention to care should focus on 'a revitalizing of subaltern (and never innocent) forms of care,' rather than asking us to make a choice 'between care and absence' (Stevenson, 2014:177). My argument in this thesis has aimed to do just that; to show that the care which show-breeders provide for pedigree dogs may appear problematic, contradictory, and often far from innocent, but in the context of the show-world, it is nonetheless good care. Here, care 'holds the potential to generate hierarchy and difference and forestall collective action' (Buch 2015:287). At the same time, however, show-world care is very much a moral practice, and one which holds people, animals, and things together, albeit at a distance which might not suggest profound engagement, at least not on the surface. Yet although I have foregrounded breeders' emotional distancing from dogs as individuals, I am not suggesting a complete lack of engagement, but rather an engagement with dogs as something other than individuals. In doing so, my research contributes to a growing body of work which argues against the notion that affective relations necessarily underpin the virtue of care practice (see also Stevenson, 2014; Crowder, 2015; Giraud & Hollin, 2016). And this has raised a question about the relationship between care and responsibility, not only in terms of the ability to respond, as Haraway (2008) has previously done, but also in terms of how obligations to care are tied to notions of agency and causal responsibility. The question, then, is about the limits of care; why breeders care for and about some dogs yet not others, and how the appearance of abnormality and disease affects their judgements about who and what is deserving of care.

On a final note, then, I wish to clarify a misconception as I see it. As Mol et al. suggest, 'care offers no control.' Instead, they argue, care 'involves living with the erratic' (2010:10). This, in my experience, is not the case in the show-world. Here, care is precisely about the attempt to regain and maintain control, and where the potential for control ends, so too does the breeders' duty of care. Yet while this definition of 'good' care depends on a conceptual distancing from individual dogs – that and a willingness to refuse care to those on the 'wrong' side of perceived boundaries and borders – I have to exonerate most breeders I met from the reductive charge of carelessness. The matter, as I hope to have shown, is more complex, yet what I can say with some certainty is that if, as many predict, pedigree dogs and their breeds fail to survive much longer, it will not be for a lack of care.



## Acknowledgements

Both in the researching and writing of this thesis, I have been hugely indebted and equally grateful to the Economic and Social Research Council for their generous financial support. In a less quantifiable but no less appreciated sense I have also been indebted to the Department of Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh for hosting and helping me with my doctoral studies, in particular my two supervisors, Richard Baxtrom and Beckie Marsland. Richard's guidance and the many insights he shared with me over the years have shaped this thesis and shaped me as an anthropologist. I'm profoundly grateful. At the same time, Beckie's kindness, encouragement, and support have been invaluable, as has her critical feedback.

Further thanks go to Jacob Copeman for his advice in the early stages of this project, and to Joost Fontien for convincing me that a study of pedigree dog breeding was a good idea. When it came to putting that idea into practice, much of it was improved in the course of conversations with Koreen Reece. It's been a pleasure watching her flourish in the course of her own PhD and now as a fully-fledged academic. With immense love and gratitude, I would like to express my thanks for her guidance and her friendship, both of which have been essential in seeing me through this long project.

I am equally pleased to thank Michele Wisdahl, Grit Wesser, Diego Malara, Don Duprez, Fauzia Malik, Sebastian Bachelet, Stephen McConnachie, Sandalia Genus, and the rest of my PhD cohort for giving so generously of their time and intellect to help me develop and clarify ideas.

Janet Carsten, Magnus Course, Jonathan Spencer, Delwar Hussain, and Sandy Robertson were kind and encouraging in countless writing-up sessions, and for that, too, I wish to express my gratitude. Alison Skipper was very helpful in sourcing materials, as well as gently corrective in my use of veterinary terms and concepts. Andrew Gardiner was remarkably encouraging and even willing to trail around Crufts with me. And Robin Irvine has been not only a good friend, but also an intelligent sounding board and the much appreciated force in pushing me back to Haraway.

For sharing their time and knowledge, my gratitude also goes out to all the vets and breeders I worked with. Obviously, none of this would have been possible without their cooperation, and I'm very grateful, in particular to 'Melanie' for welcoming me into her clinic and for all her friendship and support. Likewise, I wish to thank the Kennel Club for inviting me to visit their premises, and their staff for taking the time to talk to me and answer my many questions. Further insights came from Our Dogs, and I am grateful for my free subscription to their newspaper.



Finally, it is my privilege to thank my parents and in-laws for their emotional and financial support, and of course for their help with childcare. Iain, I thank you for being yourself and with it my hero, whatever you do. Len and Mylo, thanks for everything – for making life so wonderful and for making me better in every way.

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